

PD SHORT STORIES

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Third Duke, by Stubbs Metropolitan Museum of Art

THE FINDING OF THE ABSOLUTE

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Uncanny Stories*, by May Sinclair

I

Mr. Spalding had gone out into the garden to find peace, and had not found it. He sat there, with hunched shoulders and bowed head, dejected in the spring sunshine.

Jerry, the black cat, invited him to play; he stood on his hind legs and danced, and bowed sideways, and waved his forelegs in the air like wings. At any other time his behaviour would have enchanted Mr. Spalding, but now he couldn't even look at him; he was too miserable.

He had gone to bed miserable; he had passed a night of misery, and he had waked up more miserable than ever. He had been like that for three days and three nights straight on end, and no wonder. It wasn't only that his young wife Elizabeth had run away with Paul Jeffreson, the

Imagist poet. Besides the frailty of Elizabeth, he had discovered a fatal flaw in his own system of metaphysics. His belief in Elizabeth was gone. So was his belief in the Absolute.

The two things had come at once, to crush him. And he had to own bitterly that they were not altogether unrelated. "If," Mr. Spalding said to himself, "I had served my wife as faithfully as I have served my God, she would not now have deserted me for Paul Jeffreson." He meant that if he had not been wrapped up in his system of metaphysics, Elizabeth might still have been wrapped up in him. He had nobody but himself to thank for her behaviour.

If she had run away with anybody else, since run she must, he might have forgiven her; he might have forgiven himself; but there could be nothing but misery in store for Elizabeth. Paul Jeffreson had genius, Mr. Spalding didn't deny it; immortal genius; but he had no morals; he drank; he drugged; in Mr. Spalding's decent phrase, he did everything he shouldn't do.

You would have thought this overwhelming disaster would have completely outweighed the other trouble. But no; Mr. Spalding had a balanced mind; he mourned with equal sorrow the loss of his wife and the loss of his Absolute. A flaw in a metaphysical system may seem to you a small thing; but you must bear in mind that, ever since he could think at all, Mr. Spalding had been devoured by a hunger and thirst after metaphysical truth. He had flung over the God he had been taught to believe in because, besides being an outrage to Mr. Spalding's moral sense, he wasn't metaphysical enough. The poor man was always worrying about metaphysics; he wandered from system to system, seeking truth, seeking reality, seeking some supreme intellectual satisfaction that never came. He thought he had found it in his theory of Absolute Pantheism. But really, Spalding's Pantheism, anybody's Pantheism for that matter, couldn't, when you brought it down to bed-rock thinking, hold water for a minute. And the more Absolute he made it, the leakier it was.

For, consider, on Mr. Spalding's theory, there isn't any reality except the Absolute. Things are only real because they exist in It; because It is Them. Mr. Spalding conceived that his consciousness and Elizabeth's consciousness and Paul Jeffreson's consciousness existed somehow in the Absolute unchanged. For, if that inside existence changed them you would have to say that the ground of their present appearance lay somewhere outside the Absolute, which to Mr. Spalding was rank blasphemy. And if Elizabeth and Paul Jeffreson existed in the Absolute unchanged, then their adultery existed there unchanged. And an adultery within the Absolute outraged his moral sense as much as anything he had been told about God in his youth. The odd thing was that until Elizabeth had run away and committed it he had never thought of that. The metaphysics of Pantheism had interested him much more than its ethics. And now he could think of nothing else.

And it wasn't only Elizabeth and her iniquity; there were all the intolerable people he had ever known. There was his Uncle Sims, a mean sneak if ever there was one; and his Aunt Emily, a silly fool; and his cousin, Tom Rumbold, an obscene idiot. And his uncle's mean sneak-ishness, and his aunt's silly folly, and his cousin's obscene idiocy would have to exist in the Absolute, too; and unchanged, mind you.

And the things you see and hear—A blue sky, now, would it be blue in the Sight of God, or just something inconceivable? And noises, music? For example, I am listening to Grand Opera, and you to the jazz band in your restaurant; but the God of Pantheism is listening to both, to all the noises in the universe at once. As if He had sat down on the piano. This idea shocked Mr. Spalding even more than the thought of Elizabeth's misconduct.

Time went on. Paul Jeffreson drank himself to death. Elizabeth, worn out with grief, died of pneumonia following influenza; and Mr. Spalding still went about worrying over his inadjustable metaphysics.

And at last he, too, found himself dying.

And then he began to worry about other things. Things that had, as he put it, "happened" in his youth, before he knew Elizabeth, and one thing that had happened after she left him. He thought of them as just happening; happening to him rather than through him, against his will. In calm, philosophic moments he couldn't conceive how they had ever happened at all, how, for example, he could have endured Connie Larkins. The episodes had been brief, because in each case boredom and disgust had supervened to put asunder what Mr. Spalding owned should never have been joined. Brief, insignificant as they were, Mr. Spalding, in his dying state, was worried when he looked back on them. Supposing they were more significant than they had seemed? Supposing they had an eternal significance and entailed tremendous consequences in the after-life? Supposing you were not just wiped out, that there really was an after-life? Supposing that in that other world there was a hell?

Mr. Spalding could imagine no worse hell than the eternal repetition of such incidents; eternal repetition of boredom and disgust. Fancy going on with Connie Larkins for ever and ever, never being able to get away from her, doomed to repeat—And, if there was an Absolute, if there was reality, truth, never knowing it; being cut off from it for ever—

"He that is filthy let him be filthy still."

That was hell, the continuance of the filthy state.

He wondered whether goodness was not, after all, the important thing; he wondered whether there really was a next world; with an extreme uneasiness he wondered what would happen to him in it.

He died wondering.

II

His first thought was: Well, here I am again. I've not been wiped out. His next, that he hadn't died at all. He had gone to sleep and was now dreaming. He was not in the least agitated, nor even surprised.

He found himself alone in an immense grey space, in which there was no distinguishable object but himself. He was aware of his body as occupying a portion of this space. For he had a body; a curious, tenuous, whitish body. The odd thing was that this empty space had a sort of solidity under him. He was lying on it, stretched out on it, adrift. It supported him with the buoyancy of deep water. And yet his body was part of it, netted in.

He was now aware of two figures approaching. They came and stood, like figures treading water, one on each side of him, and he saw that they were Elizabeth and Paul Jeffreson.

Then he concluded that he was really dead; dead like Elizabeth and Jeffreson, and (since they were there) that he was in hell.

Elizabeth was speaking, and her voice sounded sweet and very kind. All the same he knew he was in hell.

"It's all right," she said. "It's queer at first, but you'll get used to it. You don't mind our coming to meet you?"

Mr. Spalding said he'd no business to mind, no right to reproach her, since they were all in the same boat. They had, all three, deserved their punishment.

"Punishment?" (Jeffreson spoke). "Why, where does he think he is?"

"I'm in hell, aren't I? If—"

"If we're here. Is that it?"

"Well, Jeffreson, I don't want to rake up old unpleasantness, but after—after what happened, you'll forgive my saying so, but what else can I think?"

He heard Jeffreson laugh; a perfectly natural laugh.

“Will you tell him, Elizabeth, or shall I?”

“You’d better. He always respected your intelligence.”

“Well, old chap, if you really want to know where you are, you’re in heaven.”

“You don’t mean to say so?”

“Fact. I daresay you’re wondering what we’re doing here?”

“Well, Elizabeth—perhaps. But, frankly, Jeffreson,

“Yes. How about me?”

“With your record I should have thought you’d even less business here than I have.”

“Wouldn’t you? I lived on unpaid bills. I drank. I drugged. There was nothing I didn’t do. What do you suppose I got in on? You’ll never guess.”

“No. No. I give it up.”

“My love of beauty. You wouldn’t think it, but it seems that actually counts here, in the eternal world.”

“And Elizabeth, what did she get in on?”

“Her love of me.”

“Then all I can say is,” said Mr. Spalding, “Heaven must be a most immoral place.”

“Oh, no. Your parochial morality doesn’t hold good here, that’s all. Why should it? It’s entirely relative. Relative to a social system with limits in time and space. Relative to a certain biological configuration that ceased with our terrestrial organisms. Not absolute. Not eternal.

“But beauty—Beauty is eternal, is absolute. And I—I loved beauty more than credit, more than drink or drugs or women, more even than Elizabeth.

“And love is eternal. And Elizabeth loved me more than you, more than respectability, more than peace and comfort, and a happy life.”

“That’s all very well, Jeffreson; and Elizabeth may be all right. Mary

Magdalene, you know. *Quia mulium amavit*, and so forth. But if a blackguard like you can slip into heaven as easily as all that, where *are* our ethics?"

"Your ethics, my dear Spalding, are where they've always been, where you came from, not here. And if I *was* what they call a bad man, that's to say a bad terrestrial organism, I was a thundering good poet. You say I slipped in easily; do you suppose it's easy to be a poet? My dear fellow, it requires an inflexibility, a purity, a discipline of mind—of *mind*, remember—that you haven't any conception of. And surely *you* should be the last person in the world to regard mind as an inferior secondary affair. Anyhow, the consequence is that I've not only got into heaven, I've got into one of the best heavens, a heaven reserved exclusively for the very finest spirits."

"Then," said Mr. Spalding, "if we're in heaven, who's in hell?"

"Couldn't say for certain. But we shouldn't put it that way. We should say: Who's gone back to earth?"

"Well—am I likely to meet Uncle Sims, or Aunt Emily, or Tom Rumbold here? You remember them, Elizabeth?"

"Oh, yes, I remember. They'd be almost certain to be sent back. They couldn't stand eternal things. There's nothing eternal about meanness and stupidity and nastiness."

"What'll happen to them, do you suppose?"

"What should you say, Paul?"

"I should say they'd suffer damnably till they'd got some bigness and intelligence and decency knocked into them."

"It'll be a sell for Aunt Emily. She was brought up to believe that stupidity was no drawback to getting into heaven."

"Lots of people," said Jeffreson, "will be sold. Like my father, the Dean of Eastminster; he was cocksure he'd get in; but they won't let him. And why, do you suppose? Because the poor old boy couldn't see that my poems were beautiful."

"But even that wouldn't have dished him, if he'd had a passion for anybody; or if he'd cared two straws about metaphysical truth. Your truth, Spalding."

"Bless me, all our preconceived ideas seem to have been wrong."

"Yes. Even I wasn't prepared for that. By the way, that's what you got

in on, your passion for truth. It's like my passion for beauty."

"But—aren't you distressed about your father, Jeffreson?"

"Oh, no. He'll get into some heaven or other some day. He'll find out that he cares for somebody, perhaps. Then he'll be all right— But don't you want to look about a bit?"

"I don't see very much to look at. It strikes me as a bit bare, your heaven."

"Oh, that's because you're only at the landing-state."

"The landing _what_?"

"State. What we used to call landing place. Times and spaces here, you know, are states. States of mind."

Mr. Spalding sat up, excited. "But—but that's what I always said they were. I and Kant."

"Well, you'd better talk to him about it."

"Talk to _him_? Shall I see Kant?"

"Look at him, Elizabeth. _Now_ he's coming alive— Of course you'll see him when you get into your own place—state, I mean. You'd better get up and come along with me and Elizabeth. We'll show you round."

[Illustration: " _Now_ he's coming alive—"]

He rose, they steadied him, and he made his way between them through the grey immensity, over a half-seen yet perfectly solid tract of something that he thought of, absurdly, as condensed space. As yet there were no objects in sight but the figures of Elizabeth and Jeffreson; the half-seen, yet tangible floor he went on seemed to create itself out of nothing, under his feet, as the desire to walk arose in him. And as yet he had felt no interest or curiosity; but as he went on he was aware of a desire to see things that became more and more urgent. He would see. He must see. He felt that before him and around him there were endless things to be seen. His mind strained forwards towards vision.

And then, suddenly, he saw.

He saw a landscape more beautiful than anything he could have imagined. It was, Jeffreson informed him, very like the umbrella pine country between Florence and Siena. As they came out of it on a great, curving road they had their faces towards the celestial west. To the south the land fell away in great red cliffs to a shining, blue sea. Like,

Jeffreson said, the Riviera, the Estérel. West and north the landscape rolled in green hill after green hill, pine-tufted, to a sweeping rampart of deep blue; such a rampart, such blue as Mr. Spalding had seen from the heights above Sidmouth, looking towards Dartmoor. Only this country had a grace, a harmony of line and colour that gave it an absolute beauty; and over it there lay a serene, unearthly radiance.

Before them, on a hill, was an exquisite little white, golden and rose-red town.

“You may or may not believe me,” said Jeffreson, “but the beauty of all this is that I made it. I mean Elizabeth and I made it between us.”

“You made it?”

“Made it.”

“How?”

“By thinking of it. By wanting it. By imagining it.”

“But—out of what?”

“I don’t know and I don’t much care. Our scientists here will tell you we made it out of the ultimate constituents of matter. Matter, unformed, only exists for us in its ultimate constituents. Something like electrons of electrons of electrons. Here we are all suspended in a web, immersed, if you like, in a sea, an air of this matter. It is utterly plastic to our imagination and our will. Imperceptible in its unformed state, it becomes visible and tangible as our minds get to work on it, and we can make out of it anything we want, including our own bodies. Only, so far as our imaginations are still under the dominion of our memories, so far will the things they create resemble the things we knew on earth. Thus you will notice that while Elizabeth and I are much more beautiful than we were on earth” (he had noticed it), “because we desired to be more beautiful, we are still recognizable as Paul and Elizabeth because our imaginations are controlled by our memories. You are as you always were, only younger than when we knew you, because your imagination had nothing but memory to go on. Everything you create here will probably be a replica of something on earth you remember.”

“But if I want something new, something beautiful that I haven’t seen before, can’t I have it?”

“Of course you can have it. Only, just at first, until your own imagination develops, you’ll have to come to me or Turner or Michael Angelo to make it for you.”

“And will these things that you and Turner and Michael Angelo make for

me be permanent?”

“Absolutely, unless we unmade them. And I don’t think we should do that against your will. Anyhow, though we can destroy our own works we can’t destroy each other’s, that is to say, reduce them to their ultimate constituents. What’s more, we shouldn’t dream of trying.”

“Why not?”

“Because old motives don’t work here. Envy, greed, theft, robbery, murder, or any sort of destruction, are unknown. They can’t happen. Nothing alters matter here but mind, and I can’t will your body to come to pieces so long as you want it to keep together. You can’t destroy it yourself as you can other things you make, because your need of it is greater than your need of other things.

“We can’t thief or rob for the same reason. Things that belong to us belong to our state of mind and can’t be torn away from it, so that we couldn’t remove anything from another person’s state into our own. And if we could we shouldn’t want to, because each of us can always have everything he wants. If I like your house or your landscape better than my own, I can make one for myself just like it. But we don’t do this, because we’re proud of our individualities here, and would rather have things different than the same— By the way, as you haven’t got a house yet, let alone a landscape, you’d better share ours.”

“That’s very good of you,” Mr. Spalding said. He was thinking of Oxford. Oxford. Quiet rooms in Balliol. He seemed to hesitate.

“If you’re still sitting on that old grievance of yours, I tell you, once for all, Spalding, I’m not going to express any regret. I’m not sorry, I’m glad I took Elizabeth away from you. I made her more happy than unhappy even on earth. And please notice it’s I who got her into heaven, not you. If she’d stayed with you and hated you, as she would have done, she couldn’t have got in.”

“I wasn’t thinking of that,” said Mr. Spalding. “I was only wondering where I could put my landscape.”

“How do you mean—‘put’ it?”

“Place it—so as not to interfere with other people’s landscapes.”

“But how on earth could you interfere? You ‘place’ it, as you call it, in your own space and in your own time.” His own space, his own time—Mr. Spalding got more and more excited.

“But—how?”

“Oh, I can’t tell you how. It simply happens.”

“But I want to understand it. I—I _must_ understand.”

“You shouldn’t put him off like that, Paul,” Elizabeth said. “He always did want to understand things.”

“But when I don’t understand them myself—”

“You’d better take him to Kant, or Hegel.”

“I should prefer Kant,” said Mr. Spalding.

“Well, Kant then. You’ll have to get into his state first.”

“How do I do that?”

“It’s very simple. You just think him up and ask him if you can come in.”

Elizabeth explained. “Like ringing somebody up, you know, and asking if you can come and call.”

“Supposing he won’t let me.”

“Trust him to say so. Of course, we mayn’t get through. He may have _thought off_.”

“You can think off, can you?”

“Yes, that’s how you protect yourself. Otherwise life here would be unbearable. Just keep quiet for a second, will you?”

There was an intense silence. Presently Jeffreson said: “Now you’re through.”

And Mr. Spalding found himself in a white-washed room, scantily furnished with three rows of bookshelves, a writing-table, a table set with mysterious instruments, and two chairs. A shaded lamp on the writing-table gave light. Mr. Spalding had left the umbrella pine country blazing with sunlight, but it seemed that Kant’s time was somewhere about ten o’clock at night. The large window was bared to a dark-blue sky of stars.

A little, middle-aged man sat at the writing-table. He wore eighteenth-century clothes and a tie wig. The face that looked up at Mr. Spalding was lean and dried, the mouth tight, the eyes shining distantly with a deep, indrawn intelligence. Mr. Spalding understood that he was in the presence of Immanuel Kant.

“You thought me up?”

“Forgive me. I am James Spalding, a student of philosophy. I was told that you might, perhaps, be willing to explain to me the—the very extraordinary conditions in which I find myself.”

“May I ask, Mr. Spalding, if you have paid any particular attention to _my_ philosophy?”

“I am one of your most devoted disciples, sir. I refuse to believe that philosophy has made any considerable advance since the Critique of Pure Reason.”

“T-t-t. My successor, Hegel, made a very considerable advance. If you have neglected Hegel—”

“Pardon me, I have not. I was once Hegel’s devoted disciple. An entrancing fantasy, the Triple Dialectic. But I came to see that yours, sir, was the safer and the saner system, and that the recurrent tendency of philosophy must be back to Kant.”

“Better say Forward with him. If you are indeed my disciple, I do not think that conditions here should have struck you as extraordinary.”

“They struck me as an extraordinary confirmation of your theory of space and time, sir.”

“They are that. They are that. But they go far beyond anything I ever dreamed of. It was not in my scheme that the Will—to which, if you remember, I gave a purely ethical and pragmatical rôle—that the Will and the imagination of individuals, of you and me, Mr. Spalding, should create their own space and time, and their own objects in space and time. I did not anticipate this multiplicity of spaces and times. In my time there was only one space and one time for everybody.

“Still, it is a very remarkable confirmation, and you may imagine, Mr. Spalding, that I was gratified when I first came here to find everybody talking and thinking correctly about time and space. You will have noticed that here we say state, meaning state of consciousness, where we used to say place. In the same way we talk about states of time, meaning time as a state of consciousness. My present state, you will observe, is exactly ten minutes past ten by my clock, which is my consciousness. My consciousness registers time automatically. My own time, mind you, not other people’s.”

“But isn’t that frightfully inconvenient? If your time isn’t everybody else’s time, how on earth—I mean how in heaven—do you keep your appointments? How do you co-ordinate?”

“We keep appointments, we co-ordinate, exactly as we used to do, by a purely arbitrary system. We measure time by space, by events, movements in space-time. Only, whereas under earthly conditions there was apparently one earth and one sun, one day and one night for everybody, here everybody has his own earth, his own sun and his own day and night. So we are obliged to take an ideal earth and sun, an ideal day and night. Their revolutions are measured exactly as we measured them on earth, by the movements of hands on a dial marking minutes and hours. Only our public clocks have five hands marking the revolutions of weeks, months and years. That is our public standardized time, and all appointments are kept, all scientific calculations made by it. The only difference between heaven and earth is that here public space-time is regarded as it really is—an unreal, a purely arbitrary and artificial convention. We know, not as a result of philosophic or mathematical reasoning, but as part of our ordinary conscious experience, that there is no absolute space and no absolute time. I would say no real space and no real time, but that in heaven a state of consciousness carries its own reality with it as such; and the time state or the space state is as real as any other.

“Of course, without an arbitrary public space-time, a public clock, states of consciousness from individual to individual could never be co-ordinated. For example, you have come straight from Mr. Jeffreson’s twelve-noon to my ten o’clock p.m. But the public clock, which you will see out there in the street—we are in Königsberg; I have no visual imagination and must rely entirely on memory for my scenery—the public clock, I say, marks time at a quarter to eight; and if I were asking Mr. Jeffreson to spend the evening with me, the hour would be fixed for us by public time at eight. But he would find himself in my time at ten.

“Now I want to point out to you, Mr. Spalding, that this way of regarding space and time is not so revolutionary as it may appear. I said, if you remember, that under terrestrial conditions there was apparently one earth and one sun, one day and night for everybody. But really, even then, everybody carried about with him his own private space and time, and his own private world in space and time. It was only, even then, by an arbitrary system of mathematical conventions, mostly geometrical, that all these private times and spaces were co-ordinated, so as to constitute one universe. Public clock time, based on the revolutions of bodies in a mathematically determined public space, was as conventional and relative an affair on earth as it is in heaven.

“Our private consciousnesses registered their own times automatically then as now, by the passage of internal events. If events passed quickly, our private time outran clock time; if they dragged, it was behindhand.

“Thus in dream experience there are many more events to the second than in waking experience; and consciousness registers by the tick-tick of events, so that in a dream we may live through crowded hours and days in the fraction of time that coincides with the knock on the door that waked us. It is absurd to say that in this case we do not live in two different time-systems.”

“Yes, and—” Mr. Spalding cried out excitedly—

“Einstein has proved that motion in public space-time is a purely relative and arbitrary thing, and that the velocity, or time value, of a ray of light moving under different conditions is a constant; when on any theory of absolute time and absolute motion it should be a variant.”

“That,” said Kant, “is no more than I should have expected.”

“You said, sir, that the only distinction between earthly and heavenly conditions is that this artificial character of standardized space-time is recognized in heaven and not on earth. I should have said that the most striking differences were, firstly, that in heaven our experience is created for us by our imagination and our will, whereas on earth it was, in your own word, sir, ‘given.’ Secondly that in heaven our states are not closed as they were on earth, but that anybody can enter anybody else’s. It seems to me that these differences are so great as to surpass anything in our experience on earth.”

“They are not so great,” said Kant, “as all that. In dreaming you already had an experience of a world created by each person for himself in a space and time of his own; a world in which you transcended the conditions of ordinary space and time. In telepathy and clairvoyance you had experience of entering other people’s states.”

“But,” Mr. Spalding said, “on earth my consciousness was dependent on a world apparently outside it, arising presumably in God’s consciousness, my body being the ostensible medium. Here, on the contrary, I have my world inside me, created by my consciousness, and my body is not so much a medium as an accessory after the fact.”

“And what inference do you draw, Mr. Spalding?”

“Why, that on earth I was nearer God, more dependent on him than in heaven. I seem to have become my own God.”

“Doesn’t it strike you that in becoming more god-like you are actually nearer God? That in this power of your imagination to conceive, this freedom of your will to create your universe, God is cutting a clearer path for himself than through that constrained and obstructed consciousness you had on earth?”

“That’s it. When I think of that appalling life of earth, the pain, sir, the horrible pain, the wickedness, the imbecility, the endless struggling through blood and filth, and being beaten, I can’t help wondering how such things can exist in the Absolute, and why the Absolute shouldn’t have put us—or as you would say, _thought_ us into this heavenly state from the beginning.”

“Do you suppose that any finite intelligence—any finite will could have been trusted, untrained, with the power we have here? Only wills disciplined by struggling against earth’s evil, only intelligences braced by wrestling with earth’s problems are fitted to create universes. You may remember my enthusiasm for the moral law, my Categorical Imperative? It is not diminished. The moral law still holds and always will hold on earth. But I see now it is not an end in itself, only the means to which this power, this freedom is the end.

“That is how and why pain and evil exist in the Absolute. It is obvious that they cannot exist in it as such, being purely relative to states of terrestrial organisms. That is why the comparatively free wills of terrestrial organisms are permitted to create pain and evil.

“When you talk of such things existing in the Absolute, unchanged and unabridged, you are talking nonsense. You are thinking of pain and evil in terms of one dimension of time and three dimensions of space, by which they are indefinitely multiplied.”

“How do you mean—one dimension of time?”

“I mean time taken as linear extension, the pure succession of past, present and future. You think of pain and evil as indefinitely distributed in space and indefinitely repeated in time, whereas in the idea, which is their form of eternity, at their worst they are not many, but one.”

“That doesn’t make them less unbearable,”

“I am not talking about that I am talking about their significance for eternity, or in the Absolute, since you said that was what distressed you.

“You will see this for yourself if you will come with me into the state of three dimensional time.”

“What’s that?” said Mr. Spalding, deeply intrigued. “That,” said the philosopher, “is time which is not linear succession, time which has turned on itself twice to take up the past and future into its present. For as the point is repeated to form the line of space, so the instant is repeated to form the linear time of past, present, future. And as the one-dimensional line turns at right angles to itself to form the

two-dimensional plane, so linear or one-dimensional time turns on itself to form two-dimensional or plane time, the past-present, or present-future. And as the plane turns on itself to form the cube, so past-present and present-future double back to meet each other and form cubic time, or past-present-future all together.

“This is the three dimensional state of consciousness we shall have to think ourselves into.”

“Do you mean to say that if we get into it we shall have solved the riddle of the universe?”

[Illustration]

“Hardly. The universe is a tremendous jig-saw puzzle. If God wanted to keep us amused to all eternity, he couldn’t have hit on anything better. We shall not be able to stay very long, or to take in _all_ past-present-future at once. But you will see enough to realize what cubic time is. You will begin with one small cubic section, which will gradually enlarge until you have taken in as much cubic time as you can hold together in one duration.

“Look out through that window. You see that cart coming down the street. It will have to pass Herr Schmidt’s house opposite and the ‘Prussian Soldier,’ and that grocer’s shop and the clock before it gets to the church.

“Now you’ll see what’ll happen.”

III

What Mr. Spalding saw was the sudden stoppage of the cart, which now appeared as standing simultaneously at each station, Herr Schmidt’s house, the inn, the grocery, the clock, the church and the side street up which it had not yet turned.

In this vision solid objects became transparent, so that he saw the side street through the intervening houses. In the same way, distributed in space as on a Mercator’s projection, he saw all the subsequent stations of the cart, up to its arrival in a farmyard between a stable and a haystack. In the same duration of time, which was his present, he saw the townspeople moving in their houses, eating, smoking and going to bed, and the peasants in their farms and cottages, and the household of the Graf in his castle. These figures retained all their positions while the amazing experience lasted.

The scene widened. It became all Königsberg, and Königsberg became all

Prussia, and Prussia all Europe. Mr. Spalding seemed to have eyes at the sides and back of his head. He saw time rising up round him as an immense cubic space. He was aware of the French Revolution, the Napoleonic wars, the Franco-Prussian war, the establishment of the French Republic, the Boer war, the death of Queen Victoria, the accession and death of King Edward VII., the accession of King George V., the Great War, the Russian and German Revolutions, the rise of the Irish Republic, the Indian Republic, the British Revolution, the British Republic, the conquest of Japan by America, and the federation of the United States of Europe and America, all going on at once.

The scene stretched and stretched, and still Mr. Spalding kept before him every item as it had first appeared. He was now aware of the vast periods of geologic time. On the past side he saw the mammoth and the caveman; on the future he saw the Atlantic flooding the North Sea and submerging the flats of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, and Kent. He saw the giant tree-ferns; he saw the great saurians trampling the marshlands and sea-beaches of the past. A flight of fearful pterodactyls darkened the air. And he saw the ice creep down and down from the poles to the vast temperate zone of Europe, America and Australasia; he saw men and animals driven before it to the belt of the equator.

And now he sank down deeper; he was swept into the stream that flowed, thudding and throbbing, through all live things; he felt it beat in and around him, jet after jet from the beating heart of God; he felt the rising of the sap in trees, the delight of animals at mating-time. He knew the joy that made Jerry, the black cat, dance on his hind legs and bow sideways and wave his forelegs like wings. The stars whirled past him with a noise like violin strings, and through it he heard the voice of Paul Jeffreson, singing a song. He was aware of an immense, all-pervading rapture pierced with stabs of pain. At the same time he was drawn back on the ebb of life into a curious peace.

His stretch widened. He was present at the beginning and the end. He saw the earth flung off, an incandescent ball, from the wheeling sun. He saw it hang like a dead white moon in a sky strewn with the corpses of spent worlds. But to his surprise he saw no darkness. He learned that light is older than the suns; that they are born of it, not it of them. The whole universe stood up on end round him, doubling all its future back upon all its past.

He saw the vast planes of time intersecting each other, like the planes of a sphere, wheeling, turning in and out of each other. He saw other space and time systems rising up, toppling, enclosing and enclosed. And as a tiny inset in the immense scene, his own life from birth to the present moment, together with the events of his heavenly life to come. In this vision Elizabeth's adultery, which had once appeared so monstrous, so overpowering an event, was revealed as slender and

insignificant.

And now the universe dissolved into the ultimate constituents of matter, electrons of electrons of electrons, an unseen web, intensely vibrating, stretched through all space and all time. He saw it sucked back into the space of space, the time of time, into the thought of God.

Mr. Spalding was drawn in with it. He passed from God's immanent to his transcendent life, into the Absolute. For one moment he thought that this was death; the next his whole being swelled and went on swelling in an unspeakable, an unthinkable bliss.

Joined with him, vibrating with him in one tremendous rapture, were the spirits of Elizabeth and Paul Jeffreson. He had now no memory of their adultery or of his own.

When he came out of his ecstasy he was aware that God was spinning his thought again, stretching the web of matter through space and time.

He was going to make another jig-saw puzzle of a universe.

OUT OF SEASON

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Three Stories & Ten Poems*, by Ernest Hemingway

On the four lira he had earned by spading the hotel garden he got quite drunk. He saw the young gentleman coming down the path and spoke to him mysteriously. The young gentleman said he had not eaten yet but would be ready to go as soon as lunch was finished. Forty minutes or an hour.

At the cantina near the bridge they trusted him for three more grappas because he was so confident and mysterious about his job for the afternoon. It was a windy day with the sun coming out from behind clouds and then going under in sprinkles of rain. A wonderful day for trout fishing.

The young gentleman came out of the hotel and asked him about the rods. Should his wife come behind with the rods? Yes, said Peduzzi, let her follow us. The young gentleman went back into the hotel and spoke to his wife. He and Peduzzi started down the road. The young gentleman had a musette over his shoulder. Peduzzi saw the wife, who looked as young as the young gentleman and was wearing mountain boots and a blue beret, start out to follow them down the road carrying the fishing rods unjointed one in each hand. Peduzzi didn't like her to be way back there. Signorina, he called, winking at the young

gentleman, come up here and walk with us. Signora come up here. Let us all walk together. Peduzzi wanted them all three to walk down the street of Cortina together.

The wife stayed behind, following rather sullenly. Signorina, Peduzzi called tenderly, come up here with us. The young gentleman looked back and shouted something. The wife stopped lagging behind, and walked up.

Everyone they met walking through the main street of the town Peduzzi greeted elaborately. _Buon' di Arturo!_ Tipping his hat. The bank clerk stared at him from the door of the Fascist café. Groups of three and four people standing in front of the shops stared at the three. The workmen in their stone-powdered jackets working on the foundations of the new hotel looked up as they passed. Nobody spoke or gave any sign to them except the town beggar, lean and old with a spittle thickened beard, who lifted his hat as they passed.

Peduzzi stopped in front of a store with the window full of bottles and brought his empty grappa bottle from an inside pocket of his old military coat. A little to drink, some marsala for the Signora, something, something to drink. He gestured with the bottle. It was a wonderful day. Marsala, you like marsala, Signorina? A little marsala?

The wife stood sullenly. You'll have to play up to this, she said. I can't understand a word he says. He's drunk isn't he?

The young gentleman appeared not to hear Peduzzi. He was thinking what in hell makes him say Marsala. That's what Max Beerbohm drinks.

Geld, Peduzzi said finally, taking hold of the young gentleman's sleeve. _Lire._ He smiled reluctant to press the subject but needing to bring the young gentleman into action.

The young gentleman took out his pocket book and gave him a ten lire note. Peduzzi went up the steps to the door of the Speciality of Domestic and Foreign Wines shop. It was locked.

It is closed until two, someone passing in the street said scornfully. Peduzzi came down the steps. He felt hurt. Never mind, he said, we can get it at the Concordia.

They walked down the road to the Concordia three abreast. On the porch of the Concordia where the rusty bobsleds were stacked the young gentleman said, _Was wollen sie?_ Peduzzi handed him the ten lira note folded over and over. Nothing, he said, Anything. He was embarrassed. Marsala maybe. I don't know. Marsala?

The door of the Concordia shut on the young gentleman and the wife. Three marsalas, said the y. g. to the girl behind the pastry counter. Two you mean? she asked. No, he said, one for a _vecchio._ Oh, she said, a _vecchio,_ and laughed getting down the bottle. She poured out the three muddy looking drinks into three glasses. The wife was sitting at a table under the line of newspapers on sticks. The y. g. put one of the marsalas in front of her. You might as well drink it, he said. Maybe it'll make you feel better. She sat and looked at the glass. The y. g. went outside the door with a glass for Peduzzi but could not see him.

I don't know where he is, he said coming back into the pastry room carrying the glass.

He wanted a quart of it, said the wife.

How much is a quarter litre, the y. g. asked the girl.

Of the bianco? One lira.

No, of the marsala. Put these two in too, he said giving her his own glass and the one poured for Peduzzi. She filled the quarter litre wine measure with a funnel. A bottle to carry it, said the y. g.

She went to hunt for a bottle. It all amused her.

I'm sorry you feel so rotten Tiny, he said, I'm sorry I talked the way I did at lunch. We were both getting at the same thing from different angles.

It doesn't make any difference, she said. None of it makes any difference.

Are you too cold, he asked. I wish you'd worn another sweater.

I've got on three sweaters.

The girl came in with a very slim brown bottle and poured the marsala into it. The y. g. paid five lira more. They went out of the door. The girl was amused. Peduzzi was walking up and down at the other end out of the wind and holding the rods.

Come on, he said, I will carry the rods. What difference does it make if anybody sees them. No one will trouble us. No one will make any trouble for me in Cortina. I know them at the _municipio._ I have been a soldier. Everybody in this town likes me. I sell frogs. What if it is forbidden to fish? Not a thing. Nothing. No trouble. Big trout I tell you. Lots of them.

They were walking down the hill toward the river. The town was in back of them. The sun had gone under and it was sprinkling rain. There, said Peduzzi, pointing to a girl in the doorway of a house they passed. My daughter.

His doctor, the wife said, has he got to show us his doctor?

He said his daughter, said the y. g.

The girl went into the house as Peduzzi pointed.

They walked down the hill across the fields and then turned to follow the river bank. Peduzzi talked rapidly with much winking and knowingness. As they walked three abreast the wife caught his breath across the wind. Once he nudged her in the ribs. Part of the time he talked in D'Ampezzo dialect and sometimes in Tyroler German dialect. He could not make out which the young gentleman and his wife understood the best so he was being bi-lingual. But as the young gentleman said _Ja Ja_ Peduzzi decided to talk altogether in Tyroler. The young gentleman and the wife understood nothing.

Everybody in the town saw us going through with these rods. We're probably being followed by the game police now. I wish we weren't in on this damn thing. This damned old fool is so drunk too.

Of course you haven't got the guts to just go back, said the wife. Of course you have to go on.

Why don't you go back? Go on back Tiny.

I'm going to stay with you. If you go to jail we might as well both go.

They turned sharp down the bank and Peduzzi stood his coat blowing in the wind gesturing at the river. It was brown and muddy. Off on the right there was a dump heap.

Say it to me in Italian, said the young gentleman

Un' mezz' ora. Piu d' un' mezz' ora.

He says it's at least a half an hour more. Go on back Tiny. You're cold in this wind anyway. It's a rotten day and we aren't going to have any fun anyway.

All right, she said, and climbed up the grassy bank.

Peduzzi was down at the river and did not notice her till she was almost out of sight over the crest. Frau! he shouted. Frau! Fraulein!

You're not going? She went on over the crest of the hill.

She's gone! said Peduzzi. It shocked him.

He took off the rubber bands that held the rod segments together and commenced to joint up one of the rods.

But you said it was half an hour further.

Oh yes. It is good half an hour down. It is good here too.

Really?

Of course. It is good here and good there too.

The y. g. sat down on the bank and jointed up a rod, put on the reel and threaded the line through the guides. He felt uncomfortable and afraid that any minute a gamekeeper or a posse of citizens would come over the bank from the town. He could see the houses of the town and the campanile over the edge of the hill. He opened his leader box. Peduzzi leaned over and dug his flat hard thumb and forefinger in and tangled the moistened leaders.

Have you some lead?

No.

You must have some lead. Peduzzi was excited. You must have _piombo. Piombo._ A little _piombo._ Just here. Just above the hook or your bait will float on the water. You must have it. Just a little _piombo._

Have you got some?

No. He looked through all his pockets desperately. Sifting through the cloth dirt in the linings of his inside military pockets. I haven't any. We must have _piombo._

We can't fish then, said the y. g. and unjointed the rod, reeling the line back through the guides. We'll get some _piombo_ and fish tomorrow.

But listen _caro,_ you must have _piombo._ The line will lie flat on the water. Peduzzi's day was going to pieces before his eyes. You must have _piombo._ A little is enough. Your stuff is all clean and new but you have no lead. I would have brought some. You said you had everything.

The y. g. looked at the stream discoloured by the melting snow. I

know, he said, we'll get some _piombo_ and fish tomorrow.

At what hour in the morning? Tell me that.

At seven.

The sun came out. It was warm and pleasant. The young gentleman felt relieved. He was no longer breaking the law. Sitting on the bank he took the bottle of marsala out of his pocket and passed it to Peduzzi. Peduzzi passed it back. The y. g. took a drink of it and passed it to Peduzzi again. Peduzzi passed it back again. Drink, he said, drink. It's your marsala. After another short drink the y. g. handed the bottle over. Peduzzi had been watching it closely. He took the bottle very hurriedly and tipped it up. The grey hairs in the folds of his neck oscillated as he drank his eyes fixed on the end of the narrow brown bottle. He drank it all. The sun shone while he drank. It was wonderful. This was a great day after all. A wonderful day.

Senta caro! In the morning at seven. He had called the young gentleman _caro_ several times and nothing had happened. It was good marsala. His eyes glistened. Days like this stretched out ahead. It would begin again at seven in the morning.

They started to walk up the hill toward the town. The y. g. went on ahead. He was quite a way up the hill. Peduzzi called to him.

Listen _caro_ can you let me take five lira for a favour?

For today? asked the young gentleman frowning.

No, not today. Give it to me today for tomorrow. I will provide everything for tomorrow. _Pane, salami, formaggio,_ good stuff for all of us. You and I and the signora. Bait for fishing, minnows, not worms only. Perhaps I can get some marsala. All for five lira. Five lira for a favour.

The young gentleman looked through his pocket book and took out a two lira note and two ones.

Thank you _caro_. Thank you, said Peduzzi in the tone of one member of the Carleton Club accepting the Morning Post from another. This was living. He was through with the hotel garden, breaking up frozen manure with a dung fork. Life was opening out.

Until seven o'clock then _caro,_ he said, slapping the y. g. on the back. Promptly at seven.

I may not be going, said the young gentleman putting his purse back

in his pocket.

What, said Peduzzi. I will have minnows Signor. _Salami,_ everything. You and I and the Signora. The three of us.

I may not be going, said the y. g., very probably not. I will leave word with the padrone at the hotel office.

THE TREASURE SHIP

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *Beasts and Super-Beasts*, by Saki

The great galleon lay in semi-retirement under the sand and weed and water of the northern bay where the fortune of war and weather had long ago ensconced it. Three and a quarter centuries had passed since the day when it had taken the high seas as an important unit of a fighting squadron—precisely which squadron the learned were not agreed. The galleon had brought nothing into the world, but it had, according to tradition and report, taken much out of it. But how much? There again the learned were in disagreement. Some were as generous in their estimate as an income-tax assessor, others applied a species of higher criticism to the submerged treasure chests, and debased their contents to the currency of goblin gold. Of the former school was Lulu, Duchess of Dulverton.

The Duchess was not only a believer in the existence of a sunken treasure of alluring proportions; she also believed that she knew of a method by which the said treasure might be precisely located and cheaply disembedded. An aunt on her mother's side of the family had been Maid of Honour at the Court of Monaco, and had taken a respectful interest in the deep-sea researches in which the Throne of that country, impatient perhaps of its terrestrial restrictions, was wont to immerse itself. It was through the instrumentality of this relative that the Duchess learned of an invention, perfected and very nearly patented by a Monegaskan savant, by means of which the home-life of the Mediterranean sardine might be studied at a depth of many fathoms in a cold white light of more than ball-room brilliancy. Implicated in this invention (and, in the Duchess's eyes, the most attractive part of it) was an electric suction dredge, specially designed for dragging to the surface such objects of interest and value as might be found in the more accessible levels of the ocean-bed. The rights of the invention were to be acquired for a matter of eighteen hundred francs, and the apparatus for a few thousand more. The Duchess of Dulverton was rich, as the world counted wealth; she nursed the hope, of being one day rich at her own computation. Companies had been formed and efforts had been made again and again during the course of three centuries to probe for the alleged treasures of the

interesting galleon; with the aid of this invention she considered that she might go to work on the wreck privately and independently. After all, one of her ancestors on her mother's side was descended from Medina Sidonia, so she was of opinion that she had as much right to the treasure as anyone. She acquired the invention and bought the apparatus.

Among other family ties and encumbrances, Lulu possessed a nephew, Vasco Honiton, a young gentleman who was blessed with a small income and a large circle of relatives, and lived impartially and precariously on both. The name Vasco had been given him possibly in the hope that he might live up to its adventurous tradition, but he limited himself strictly to the home industry of adventurer, preferring to exploit the assured rather than to explore the unknown. Lulu's intercourse with him had been restricted of recent years to the negative processes of being out of town when he called on her, and short of money when he wrote to her. Now, however, she bethought herself of his eminent suitability for the direction of a treasure-seeking experiment; if anyone could extract gold from an unpromising situation it would certainly be Vasco—of course, under the necessary safeguards in the way of supervision. Where money was in question Vasco's conscience was liable to fits of obstinate silence.

Somewhere on the west coast of Ireland the Dulverton property included a few acres of shingle, rock, and heather, too barren to support even an agrarian outrage, but embracing a small and fairly deep bay where the lobster yield was good in most seasons. There was a bleak little house on the property, and for those who liked lobsters and solitude, and were able to accept an Irish cook's ideas as to what might be perpetrated in the name of mayonnaise, Innisgluther was a tolerable exile during the summer months. Lulu seldom went there herself, but she lent the house lavishly to friends and relations. She put it now at Vasco's disposal.

"It will be the very place to practise and experiment with the salvage apparatus," she said; "the bay is quite deep in places, and you will be able to test everything thoroughly before starting on the treasure hunt."

In less than three weeks Vasco turned up in town to report progress.

"The apparatus works beautifully," he informed his aunt; "the deeper one got the clearer everything grew. We found something in the way of a sunken wreck to operate on, too!"

"A wreck in Innisgluther Bay!" exclaimed Lulu.

"A submerged motor-boat, the _Sub-Rosa_," said Vasco.

"No! really?" said Lulu; "poor Billy Yuttley's boat. I remember it went down somewhere off that coast some three years ago. His body was washed ashore at the Point. People said at the time that the boat was capsized

intentionally—a case of suicide, you know. People always say that sort of thing when anything tragic happens.”

“In this case they were right,” said Vasco.

“What do you mean?” asked the Duchess hurriedly. “What makes you think so?”

“I know,” said Vasco simply.

“Know? How can you know? How can anyone know? The thing happened three years ago.”

“In a locker of the _Sub-Rosa_ I found a water-tight strong-box. It contained papers.” Vasco paused with dramatic effect and searched for a moment in the inner breast-pocket of his coat. He drew out a folded slip of paper. The Duchess snatched at it in almost indecent haste and moved appreciably nearer the fireplace.

“Was this in the _Sub-Rosa’s_ strong-box?” she asked.

“Oh no,” said Vasco carelessly, “that is a list of the well-known people who would be involved in a very disagreeable scandal if the _Sub-Rosa’s_ papers were made public. I’ve put you at the head of it, otherwise it follows alphabetical order.”

The Duchess gazed helplessly at the string of names, which seemed for the moment to include nearly every one she knew. As a matter of fact, her own name at the head of the list exercised an almost paralysing effect on her thinking faculties.

“Of course you have destroyed the papers?” she asked, when she had somewhat recovered herself. She was conscious that she made the remark with an entire lack of conviction.

Vasco shook his head.

“But you should have,” said Lulu angrily; “if, as you say, they are highly compromising—”

“Oh, they are, I assure you of that,” interposed the young man.

“Then you should put them out of harm’s way at once. Supposing anything should leak out, think of all these poor, unfortunate people who would be involved in the disclosures,” and Lulu tapped the list with an agitated gesture.

“Unfortunate, perhaps, but not poor,” corrected Vasco; “if you read the list carefully you’ll notice that I haven’t troubled to include anyone

whose financial standing isn't above question."

Lulu glared at her nephew for some moments in silence. Then she asked hoarsely: "What are you going to do?"

"Nothing—for the remainder of my life," he answered meaningly. "A little hunting, perhaps," he continued, "and I shall have a villa at Florence. The Villa Sub-Rosa would sound rather quaint and picturesque, don't you think, and quite a lot of people would be able to attach a meaning to the name. And I suppose I must have a hobby; I shall probably collect Raeburns."

Lulu's relative, who lived at the Court of Monaco, got quite a snappish answer when she wrote recommending some further invention in the realm of marine research.

THE MARKET-HUNTER

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *A Young Man in a Hurry*, by Robert W. Chambers

A warm October was followed by a muggy, wet November. The elm leaves turned yellow but did not fall; the ash-trees lighted up the woods like gigantic lanterns set in amber; single branches among the maples slowly crimsoned. As yet the dropping of acorns rarely broke the forest silence in Sagamore County, although the blue-jays screamed in the alders and crows were already gathering for their annual caucus.

Because there had been as yet no frost the partridges still lurked deep in the swamps, and the woodcock skulked, shunning the white birches until the ice-storms in the north should set their comrades moving southward.

There was little doing in the feathered world. Of course the swallows had long since departed, and with the advent of the blue-jays and golden-winged wood peckers a few heavy-pinioned hawks had appeared, wheeling all day over the pine-woods, calling querulously.

Then one still night the frost silvered the land, and the raccoons whistled from the beach-woods on the ridges, and old man Jocelyn's daughter crept from her chilly bed to the window which framed a staring, frosty moon.

Through the silence she heard a whisper like the discreet rustle of silken hangings. It was the sound of leaves falling through the darkness. She peered into the night, where, unseen, the delicate fingers of the frost were touching a million leaves, and as each little leaf was

summoned she heard it go, whispering obedience.

Now the moonlight seemed to saturate her torn, thin night-gown and lie like frost on her body; and she crept to the door of her room, shivering, and called, "Father!"

He answered heavily, and the bed in the next room creaked.

"There is a frost," she said; "shall I load the cartridges?"

She could hear him stumble out of bed and grope for the window.

Presently he yawned loudly and she heard him tumble back into bed.

"There won't be no flight to-night," he said; "the birds won't move for twenty-four hours. Go to bed, Jess."

"But there are sure to be a few droppers in to-night," she protested.

"Go to bed," he said, shortly.

After a moment she began again: "I don't mind loading a dozen shells, dad."

"What for?" he said. "It's my fault I ain't ready. I didn't want you foolin' with candles around powder and shot."

"But I want you to have a good time to-morrow," she urged, with teeth chattering. "You know," and she laughed a mirthless laugh, "it's Thanksgiving Day, and two woodcock are as good as a turkey."

What he said was, "Turkey be darned!" but, nevertheless, she knew he was pleased, so she said no more.

There was a candle on her bureau; she lighted it with stiff fingers, then trotted about over the carpetless floor, gathering up the loading-tools and flimsy paper shells, the latter carefully hoarded after having already served.

Sitting there at the bedside, bare feet wrapped in a ragged quilt, and a shawl around her shoulders, she picked out the first shell and placed it in the block. With one tap she forced out the old primer, inserted a new one, and drove it in. Next she plunged the rusty measuring-cup into the black powder and poured the glistening grains into the shell, three drams and a half. On this she drove in two wads. Now the shell was ready for an ounce and an eighth of number nine shot, and she measured it and poured it in with practised hand. Then came the last wad, a quick twirl of the crimper, and the first shell lay loaded on the pillow.

Before she finished her hands were numb and her little feet like frozen marble. But at last two dozen cartridges were ready, and she gathered them up in the skirt of her night-gown and carried them to her father's door.

"Here they are," she said, rolling them in a heap on the floor; and, happy at his sleepy protest, she crept back to bed again, chilled to the knees.

At dawn the cold was intense, but old man Jocelyn, descending the dark stairway gun in hand, found his daughter lifting the coffee-pot from the stove.

"You're a good girl, Jess," he said. Then he began to unwind the flannel cover from his gun. In the frosty twilight outside a raccoon whistled from the alders.

When he had unrolled and wiped his gun he drew a shaky chair to the pine table and sat down. His daughter watched him, and when he bent his gray head she covered her eyes with one delicate hand.

"Lord," he said, "it being Thanksgiving, I do hereby give Thee a few extry thanks." And "Amen" they said together.

Jess stood warming herself with her back to the stove, watching her father busy with his bread and coffee. Her childish face was not a sad one, yet in her rare smile there was a certain beauty which sorrow alone brings to young lips and eyes.

Old man Jocelyn stirred his sugarless coffee and broke off a lump of bread.

"One of young Gordon's keepers was here yesterday," he said, abruptly.

His daughter slowly raised her head and twisted her dishevelled hair into a great, soft knot. "What did Mr. Gordon's keeper want?" she asked, indifferently.

"Why, some one," said old man Jocelyn, with an indescribable sneer--"some real mean man has been and shot out them swales along Brier Brook."

"Did you do it?" asked the girl.

"Why, come to think, I guess I did," said her father, grinning.

"It is your right," said his daughter, quietly; "the Brier Brook swales were yours."

"Before young Gordon's pa swindled me out o' them," observed Jocelyn, tearing off more bread. "And," he added, "even old Gordon never dared post his land in them days. If he had he'd been tarred 'n' feathered."

His daughter looked grave, then a smile touched her eyes, and she said: "I hear, daddy, that young Gordon gives you cattle and seeds and ploughs."

Jocelyn wheeled around like a flash. "Who told you that?" he demanded, sharply.

The incredulous smile in her eyes died out. She stared at him blankly.

"Why, of course it wasn't true," she said.

"Who told you?" he cried, angrily.

"Murphy told me," she stammered. "Of course it is a lie! of course he lied, father! I told him he lied--"

With horror in her eyes she stared at her father, but Jocelyn sat sullenly brooding over his coffee-cup and tearing bit after bit from the crust in his fist.

"Has young Gordon ever said that to you?" he demanded, at length.

"I have never spoken to him in all my life," answered the girl, with a dry sob. "If I had known that he gave things to--to--us--I should have died--"

Jocelyn's eyes were averted. "How dare he!" she went on, trembling. "We are not beggars! If we have nothing, it is his father's shame--and his shame! Oh, father, father! I never thought--I never for one instant thought--"

"Don't, Jess!" said Jocelyn, hoarsely.

Then he rose and laid a heavy hand on the table. "I took his cows and his ploughs and his seed. What of it? He owes me more! I took them for your sake--to try to find a living in this bit of flint and sand--for you. Birds are scarce. They've passed a law against market-shooting. Every barrel of birds I send out may mean prison. I've lived my life as a market-hunter; I ain't fitted for farming. But you were growing, and you need schooling, and between the game-warden and young Gordon I couldn't keep you decent--so I took his damned cattle and I dug in the ground. What of it!" he ended, violently. And, as she did not speak, he gave voice to the sullen rage within him--"I took his cattle and his ploughs as I take his birds. They ain't his to give; they're mine to take--the birds are. I guess when God set the first hen partridge on her

nest in Sagamore woods he wasn't thinking particularly about breeding them for young Gordon!"

He picked up his gun and started heavily for the door. His eyes met the eyes of his daughter as she drew the frosty latch for him. There was a pause, then he pulled his cap over his eyes with a long grunt.

"Dear dad," she said, under her breath.

"I guess," he observed unsteadily, "you're ashamed of me, Jess."

She put both arms around his neck and laid her head against his.

"I think as you do," she said; "God did not create the partridges for Mr. Gordon--but, darling dad, you will never, never again take even one grain of buckwheat from him, will you?"

"His father robbed mine," said Jocelyn, with a surly shrug. But she was content with his answer and his rough kiss, and when he had gone out into the gray morning, calling his mongrel setter from its kennel, she went back up the stairs and threw herself on her icy bed. But her little face was hot with tearless shame, and misery numbed her limbs, and she cried out in her heart for God to punish old Gordon's sin from generation to generation--meaning that young Gordon should suffer for the sins of his father. Yet through her torture and the burning anger of her prayer ran a silent undercurrent, a voiceless call for mercy upon her and upon all she loved, her father and--young Gordon.

After a while she fell asleep dreaming of young Gordon. She had never seen him except Sundays in church, but now she dreamed he came into her pew and offered her a hymn-book of ivory and silver; and she dreamed they sang from it together until the church thrilled with their united voices. But the song they sang seemed to pain her, and her voice hurt her throat. His voice, too, grew harsh and piercing, and--she awoke with the sun in her eyes and the strident cries of the blue-jays in her ears.

Under her window she heard somebody moving. It was her father, already returned, and he stood by the door, drawing and plucking half a dozen woodcock.

When she had bathed and dressed, she found the birds on the kitchen-table ready for the oven, and she set about her household duties with a glance through the window where Jocelyn, crouching on the bank of the dark stream, was examining his set-lines one by one.

The sun hung above the forest, sending fierce streams of light over the flaming, frost-ripened foliage. A belt of cloud choked the mountain gorge in the north; the alders were smoking with chilly haze.

As she passed across the yard towards the spring, bucket in hand, her father called out: "I guess we'll keep Thanksgiving, Jess, after all. I've got a five-pounder here!"

He held up a slim, gold-and-green pickerel, then flung the fish on the ground with the laugh of a boy. It was always so; the forest and the pursuit of wild creatures renewed his life. He was born for it; he had lived a hunter and a roamer of the woods; he bade fair to die a poacher--which, perhaps, is no sin in the eyes of Him who designed the pattern of the partridge's wings and gave two coats to the northern hare.

His daughter watched him with a strained smile. In her bitterness against Gordon, now again in the ascendant, she found no peace of mind.

"Dad," she said, "I set six deadfalls yesterday. I guess I'll go and look at them."

"If you line them too plainly, Gordon's keepers will save you your trouble," said Jocelyn.

"Well, then, I think I'll go now," said the girl. Her eyes began to sparkle and the wings of her delicate nostrils quivered as she looked at the forest on the hill.

Jocelyn watched her. He noted the finely moulded head, the dainty nose, the clear, fearless eyes. It was the sensitive head of a free woman--a maid of windy hill-sides and of silent forests. He saw the faint quiver of the nostril, and he thought of the tremor that twitches the dainty muzzles of thoroughbred dogs afield. It was in her, the mystery and passion of the forest, and he saw it and dropped his eyes to the fish swinging from his hand.

"Your mother was different," he said, slowly.

Instinctively they both turned towards the shanty. Beside the doorstep rose a granite headstone.

After a while Jocelyn drew out his jack-knife and laid the fish on the dead grass, and the girl carried the bucket of water back to the house. She reappeared a moment later, wearing her father's shooting-jacket and cap, and with a quiet "good-bye" to Jocelyn she started across the hill-side towards the woods above.

Jocelyn watched her out of sight, then turning the pickerel over, he slit the firm, white belly from vent to gill.

About that time, just over the scrubby hill to the north, young Gordon was walking, knee deep in the bronzed sweet fern, gun cocked, eyes

alert. His two beautiful dogs were working close, quartering the birch-dotted hill-side in perfect form. But they made no points; no dropping woodcock whistled up from the shelter of birch or alder; no partridge blundered away from bramble covert or willow fringe. Only the blue-jays screamed at him as he passed; only the heavy hawks, sailing, watched him with bright eyes.

He was a dark-eyed, spare young man, with well-shaped head and a good mouth. He wore his canvas shooting-clothes like a soldier, and handled his gun and his dogs with a careless ease that might have appeared slovenly had the results been less precise. But even an amateur could see how thoroughly the ground was covered by those silent dogs. Gordon never spoke to them; a motion of his hand was enough.

Once a scared rabbit scuttled out of the sweet fern and bounded away, displaying the piteous flag of truce, and Gordon smiled to himself when his perfectly trained dogs crossed the alluring trail without a tremor, swerving not an inch for bunny and his antics.

But what could good dogs do, even if well handled, when there had been no flight from the north? So Gordon signalled the dogs and walked on.

That part of his property which he had avoided for years he now came in sight of from the hill, and he halted, gun under his arm. There was the fringe of alders, mirrored in Rat's Run; there was Jocelyn's shanty, the one plague-spot in his estate; there, too, was old man Jocelyn, on his knees beside the stream, fussing with something that glistened, probably a fish.

The young man on the hill-top tossed his gun over his shoulder and called his two silvery-coated dogs to heel; then he started to descend the slope, the November sunlight dancing on the polished gun-barrels. Down through the scrubby thickets he strode; burr and thorn scraped his canvas jacket, blackberry-vines caught at elbow and knee. With an unfeigned scowl he kept his eyes on Jocelyn, who was still pottering on the stream's bank, but when Jocelyn heard him come crackling through the stubble and looked up the scowl faded, leaving Gordon's face unpleasantly placid.

"Good-morning, Jocelyn," said the young man, stepping briskly to the bank of the stream; "I want a word or two with you."

"Words are cheap," said Jocelyn, sitting up on his haunches; "how many will you have, Mr. Gordon?"

"I want you," said Gordon, slowly emphasizing each word, "to stop your depredations on my property, once and for all."

Squatting there on the dead grass, Jocelyn eyed him sullenly without

replying.

"Do you understand?" said Gordon, sharply.

"Well, what's the trouble now--" began Jocelyn, but Gordon cut him short.

"Trouble! You've shot out every swale along Brier Brook! There isn't a partridge left between here and the lake! And it's a shabby business, Jocelyn--a shabby business."

He flung his fowling-piece into the hollow of his left arm and began to walk up and down the bank.

"This is my land," he said, "and I want no tenants. There were a dozen farms on the property when it came to me; I gave every tenant a year's lease, rent free, and when they moved out I gave them their houses to take down and rebuild outside of my boundary-lines. Do you know any other man who would do as much?"

Jocelyn was silent.

"As for you," continued Gordon, "you were left in that house because your wife's grave is there at your very threshold. You have your house free, you pay no rent for the land, you cut your wood without payment. My gardener has supplied you with seed, but you never cultivate the land; my manager has sent you cows, but you sell them."

"One died," muttered Jocelyn.

"Yes--with a cut throat," replied Gordon. "See here, Jocelyn, I don't expect gratitude or civility from you, but I do expect you to stop robbing me!"

"Robbing!" repeated Jocelyn, angrily, rising to his feet.

"Yes, robbing! My land is posted, warning people not to shoot or fish or cut trees. The land, the game, and the forests are mine, and you have no more right to kill a bird or cut a tree on my property than I have to enter your house and steal your shoes!"

Gordon's face was flushed now, and he came and stood squarely in front of Jocelyn. "You rob me," he said, "and you break not only my own private rules, but also the State laws. You shoot for the market, and it's a dirty, contemptible thing to do!"

Jocelyn glared at him, but Gordon looked him straight in the eye and went on, calmly: "You are a law-breaker, and you know it! You snare my trout, you cover the streams with set-lines and gang-hooks, you get more

partridges with winter grapes and deadfalls than you do with powder and shot. As long as your cursed poaching served to fill your own stomach I stood it, but now that you've started wholesale game slaughter for the market I am going to stop the whole thing."

The two men faced each other in silence for a moment; then Jocelyn said: "Are you going to tear down my house?"

Gordon did not answer. It was what he wanted to do, but he looked at the gaunt, granite headstone in the door-yard, then dropped the butt of his gun to the dead sod again. "Can't you be decent, Jocelyn?" he asked, harshly.

Jocelyn was silent.

"I don't want to turn you out," said Gordon. "Can't you let my game alone? Come, let's start again; shall we? I'll send Banks down to-morrow with a couple of cows and a crate or two of chickens, and Murphy shall bring you what seeds you want for late planting--"

"To hell with your seeds!" roared Jocelyn, in a burst of fury. "To hell with your cows and your Murphys and your money and yourself, you loafing millionaire! Do you think I want to dig turnips any more than you do? I was born free in a free land before you were born at all! I hunted these swales and fished these streams while you were squalling for your pap!"

With blazing eyes the ragged fellow shook his fist at Gordon, cursing him fiercely, then with a violent gesture he pointed at the ground under his feet: "Let those whose calling is to dig, dig!" he snarled. "I've turned my last sod!"

Except that Gordon's handsome face had grown a little white under the heavy coat of tan, he betrayed no emotion as he said: "You are welcome to live as you please--under the law. But if you fire one more shot on this land I shall be obliged to ask you to go elsewhere."

"Keep your ears open, then!" shouted Jocelyn, "for I'll knock a pillowful of feathers out of the first partridge I run over!"

"Better not," said Gordon, gravely.

Jocelyn hitched up his weather-stained trousers and drew his leather belt tighter. "I told you just now," he said, "that I'd never turn another sod. I'll take that back."

"I am glad to hear it," said Gordon, pleasantly.

"Yes," continued Jocelyn, with a grim gesture, "I'll take it back. You see, I buried my wife yonder, and I guess I'm free to dig up what I

planted. And I'll do it."

After a pause he added: "Tear the house down. I'm done with it. I guess I can find room somewhere underground for her, and a few inches on top of the ground for me to sit down on."

"Don't talk like that," said Gordon, reddening to the roots of his hair. "You are welcome to the house and the land, and you know it. I only ask you to let my game alone."

"Your game?" retorted Jocelyn. "They're wild creatures, put there by Him who fashioned them."

"Nonsense!" said Gordon, dryly. "My land is my own. Would you shoot the poultry in my barn-yard?"

"If I did," cried Jocelyn, with eyes ablaze, "I'd not be in your debt, young man. You are walking on my father's land. Ask your father why! Yes, go back to the city and hunt him up at his millionaire's club and ask him why you are driving Tom Jocelyn off of his old land!"

"My father died three years ago," said Gordon, between his set teeth. "What do you mean?"

Jocelyn looked at him blankly.

"What do you mean?" repeated Gordon, with narrowing eyes.

Jocelyn stood quite still. Presently he looked down at the fish on the ground and moved it with his foot. Then Gordon asked him for the third time what he meant, and Jocelyn, raising his eyes, answered him: "With the dead all quarrels die."

"That is not enough!" said Gordon, harshly. "Do you believe my father wronged you?"

"He's dead," said Jocelyn, as though speaking to himself.

Presently he picked up the fish and walked towards his house, gray head bent between his shoulders.

For a moment Gordon hesitated, then he threw his gun smartly over his shoulder and motioned his dogs to heel. But his step had lost something of its elasticity, and he climbed the hill slowly, following with troubled eyes his own shadow, which led him on over the dead grass.

The edge of the woods was warm in the sunshine. Faint perfumes of the vanished summer lingered in fern and bramble.

He did not enter the woods. There was a fallen log, rotten and fragrant, half buried in the briers, and on it he found a seat, calling his dogs to his feet.

In the silence of morning he could hear the pine-borers at work in the log he was sitting on, scra-ape! scra-ape! scr-r-rape! deep in the soft, dry pulp under the bark. There were no insects abroad except the white-faced pine hornets, crawling stiffly across the moss. He noticed no birds, either, at first, until, glancing up, he saw a great drab butcher-bird staring at him from a dead pine.

At first that inert oppression which always came when the memory of his father returned to him touched his fine lips with a gravity too deep for his years. No man had ever said that his father had dealt unfairly with men, yet for years now his son had accumulated impressions, vague and indefinable at first, but clearer as he grew older, and the impressions had already left the faintest tracery of a line between his eyebrows. He had known his father as a hard man; he knew that the world had found him hard and shrewd. And now, as he grew older and understood what the tribute of honest men was worth, even to the dead, he waited to hear one word. But he never heard it. He had heard other things, however, but always veiled, like the menacing outbreak of old man Jocelyn--nothing tangible, nothing that he could answer or refute. At times he became morbid, believing he could read reproach in men's eyes, detect sarcasm in friendly voices. Then for months he would shun men, as he was doing now, living alone month after month in the great, silent house where his father and his grandfather's father had been born. Yet even here among the Sagamore Hills he had found it--that haunting hint that honor had been moulded to fit occasions when old Gordon dealt with his fellow-men.

He glanced up again at the butcher-bird, and rose to his feet. The bird's cruel eyes regarded him steadily.

"You wholesale murderer," thought Gordon, "I'll just give you a charge of shot."

But before he could raise his gun, the shrike, to his amazement, burst into an exquisite song, sweet and pure as a thrush's melody, and, spreading its slaty wings, it sailed off through the sunshine.

"That's a new trick to me," said Gordon, aloud, wondering to hear such music from the fierce feathered criminal. But he let it go for the sake of its song, and, lowering his gun again, he pushed into the underbrush.

The yellow beech leaves illuminated the woods above and under foot; he smelled the scent of ripened foliage, he saw the purple gentians wistfully raising their buds which neither sun nor frost could ever unseal.

In a glade where brambles covered a tiny stream, creeping through layers of jewel-weed and mint, the white setter in the lead swung suddenly west, quartered, wheeled, crept forward and stiffened to a point. Behind him his mate froze into a silvery statue. But Gordon walked on, gun under his arm, and the covey rose with a roar of heavy wings, driving blindly through the tangle deep into the dim wood's depths.

Gordon was not in a killing mood that morning.

When the puzzled dogs had come wagging in and had been quietly motioned to heel, Gordon stood still and looked around at the mottled tree-trunks glimmering above the underbrush. The first beechnuts had dropped; a few dainty sweet acorns lay under the white oaks. Somewhere above a squirrel scolded incessantly.

As he was on the point of moving forward, stooping to avoid an ozier, something on the edge of the thicket caught his eye. It was a twig, freshly broken, hanging downward by a film of bark.

After he had examined it he looked around cautiously, peering into the thicket until, a few yards to the right, he discovered another twig, freshly broken, hanging by its film of bark.

An ugly flush stained his forehead; he set his lips together and moved on noiselessly. Other twigs hung dangling every few yards, yet it took an expert's eye to detect them among the tangles and clustering branches. But he knew what he was to find at the end of the blind trail, and in a few minutes he found it. It was a deadfall, set, and baited with winter grapes.

Noiselessly he destroyed it, setting the heavy stone on the moss without a sound; then he searched the thicket for the next "line," and in a few moments he discovered another broken twig leading to the left.

He had been on the trail for some time, losing it again and again before the suspicion flashed over him that there was somebody ahead who had either seen or heard him and who was deliberately leading him astray with false "lines" that would end in nothing. He listened; there was no sound either of steps or of cracking twigs, but both dogs had begun growling and staring into the demi-light ahead. He motioned them on and followed. A moment later both dogs barked sharply.

As he stepped out of the thicket on one side, a young girl, standing in the more open and heavier timber, raised her head and looked at him with grave, brown eyes. Her hands were on the silky heads of his dogs; from her belt hung a great, fluffy cock-partridge, outspread wings still limber.

He knew her in an instant; he had seen her often in church. Perplexed

and astonished, he took off his cap in silence, finding absolutely nothing to say, although the dead partridge at her belt furnished a text on which he had often displayed biting eloquence.

After a moment he smiled, partly at the situation, partly to put her at her ease.

"If I had known it was you," he said, "I should not have followed those very inviting twigs I saw dangling from the oziers and moose-vines."

"Lined deadfalls are thoroughfares to woodsmen," she answered, defiantly. "You are as free as I am in these woods--but not more free."

The defiance, instead of irritating him, touched him. In it he felt a strange pathos--the proud protest of a heart that beat as free as the thudding wings of the wild birds he sometimes silenced with a shot.

"It is quite true," he said, gently; "you are perfectly free in these woods."

"But not by your leave!" she said, and the quick color stung her cheeks.

"It is not necessary to ask it," he replied.

"I mean," she said, desperately, "that neither I nor my father recognize your right to these woods."

"Your father?" he repeated, puzzled.

"Don't you know who I am?" she said, in surprise.

"I know you sing very beautifully in church," he said, smiling.

"My name," she said, quietly, "is the name of your father's old neighbor. I am Jessie Jocelyn."

His face was troubled, even in his surprise. The line between his eyes deepened. "I did not know you were Mr. Jocelyn's daughter," he said, at last.

Neither spoke for a moment. Presently Gordon raised his head and found her brown eyes on him.

"I wish," he said, wistfully, "that you would let me walk with you a little way. I want to ask your advice. Will you?"

"I am going home," she said, coldly.

She turned away, moving two or three paces, then the next step was less

hasty, and the next was slower still. As he joined her she looked up a trifle startled, then bent her head.

"Miss Jocelyn," he said, abruptly, "have you ever heard your father say that my father treated him harshly?"

She stopped short beside him. "Have you?" he repeated, firmly.

"I think," she said, scornfully, "your father can answer that question."

"If he could," said Gordon, "I would ask him. He is dead."

She was listening to him with face half averted, but now she turned around and met his eyes again.

"Will you answer my question?" he said.

"No," she replied, slowly; "not if he is dead."

Young Gordon's face was painfully white. "I beg you, Miss Jocelyn, to answer me," he said. "I beg you will answer for your father's sake and--in justice to my father's son."

"What do you care--" she began, but stopped short. To her surprise her own bitterness seemed forced. She saw he did care. Suddenly she pitied him.

"There was a promise broken," she said, gravely.

"What else?"

"A man's spirit."

They walked on, he clasping his gun with nerveless hands, she breaking the sapless twigs as she passed, with delicate, idle fingers.

Presently he said, as though speaking to himself: "He had no quarrel with the dead, nor has the dead with him--now. What my father would now wish I can do--I can do even yet--"

Under her deep lashes her brown eyes rested on him pitifully. But at his slightest motion she turned away, walking in silence.

As they reached the edge of the woods in a burst of sunshine he looked up at her and she stopped. Below them the smoke curled from her weather-racked house. "Will you have me for a guest?" he said, suddenly.

"A guest!" she faltered.

A new mood was on him; he was smiling now.

"Yes, a guest. It is Thanksgiving Day, Miss Jocelyn. Will you and your father forget old quarrels--and perhaps forgive?"

Again she rested her slender hands on his dogs' heads, looking out over the valley.

"Will you forgive?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I? Yes," she said, startled.

"Then," he went on, smiling, "you must invite me to be your guest. When I look at that partridge, Miss Jocelyn, hunger makes me shameless. I want a second-joint--indeed I do!"

Her sensitive lips trembled into a smile, but she could not meet his eyes yet.

"Our Thanksgiving dinner would horrify you," she said--"a pickerel taken on a gang-hook, woodcock shot in Brier Brook swales, and this partridge--" She hesitated.

"And that partridge a victim to his own rash passion for winter grapes," added Gordon, laughing.

The laugh did them both good.

"I could make a chestnut stuffing," she said, timidly.

"Splendid! Splendid!" murmured Gordon.

"Are you really coming?" she asked.

Something in her eyes held his, then he answered with heightened color, "I am very serious, Miss Jocelyn. May I come?"

She said "Yes" under her breath. There was color enough in her lips and cheeks now.

So young Gordon went away across the hills, whistling his dogs cheerily on, the sunlight glimmering on the slanting barrels of his gun. They looked back twice. The third time she looked he was gone beyond the brown hill's crest.

She came to her own door all of a tremble. Old man Jocelyn sat sunning his gray head on the south porch, lean hands folded over his stomach, pipe between his teeth.

"Daddy," she said, "look!" and she held up the partridge. Jocelyn smiled.

All the afternoon she was busy in the kitchen, and when the early evening shadows lengthened across the purple hills she stood at the door, brown eyes searching the northern slope.

The early dusk fell over the alder swales; the brawling brook was sheeted with vapor.

Up-stairs she heard her father dressing in his ancient suit of rusty black and pulling on his obsolete boots. She stole into the dining-room and looked at the table. Three covers were laid.

She had dressed in her graduating gown--a fluffy bit of white and ribbon. Her dark soft hair was gathered simply; a bunch of blue gentian glimmered at her belt.

Suddenly, as she lingered over the table, she heard Gordon's step on the porch, and the next instant her father came down the dark stairway into the dining-room just as Gordon entered.

The old man halted, eyes ablaze. But Gordon came forward gravely, saying, "I asked Miss Jocelyn if I might come as your guest to-night. It would have been a lonely Thanksgiving at home."

Jocelyn turned to his daughter in silence. Then the three places laid at table and the three chairs caught his eye.

"I hope," said Gordon, "that old quarrels will be forgotten and old scores wiped out. I am sorry I spoke as I did this morning. You are quite right, Mr. Jocelyn; the land is yours and has always been yours. It is from you I must ask permission to shoot."

Jocelyn eyed him grimly.

"Don't make it hard for me," said Gordon. "The land is yours, and that also which you lost with it will be returned. It is what my father wishes--now."

He held out his hand. Jocelyn took it as though stunned.

Gordon, still holding his hand, drew him outside to the porch.

"How much did you have in the Sagamore & Wyandotte Railway before our system bought it?" asked Gordon.

"All I had--seven thousand dollars--" Suddenly the old man's hand began to tremble. He raised his gray head and looked up at the stars.

"That is yours still," said Gordon, gently, "with interest. My father wishes it."

Old man Jocelyn looked up at the stars. They seemed to swim in silver streaks through the darkness.

"Come," said Gordon, gayly, "we are brother sportsmen now--and that sky means a black frost and a flight. Will you invite me to shoot over Brier Brook swales to-morrow?"

As he spoke, high in the starlight a dark shadow passed, coming in from the north, beating the still air with rapid wings. It was a woodcock, the first flight bird from the north.

"Come to dinner, young man," said Jocelyn, excited; "the flight is on and we must be on Brier Brook by daybreak."

In the blaze of a kerosene-lamp they sat down at table. Gordon looked across at Jocelyn's daughter; her eyes met his, and they smiled.

Then old man Jocelyn bent his head on his hard clasped hands.

"Lord," he said, tremulously, "it being Thanksgiving, I gave Thee extry thanks this A.M. It being now P.M., I do hereby double them extry thanks"--his mind wandered a little--"with interest to date. Amen."

THREE MEETINGS

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Diary of a Superfluous Man and Other Stories*, by Iván Turgénieff
(1851)

I

Passa que' colli e vieni allegramente;
Non ti curar di tanta compagnia--
Vieni pensando a me segretamente--
Ch'io t'accompagna per tutta la via.[20]

During the whole course of the summer, I had gone a-hunting nowhere so frequently as to the large village of Glínnoe, situated twenty versts from my hamlet. In the environs of this village there are, in all probability, the very best haunts of game in all our county. After having tramped through all the adjacent bush-plots and fields, I invariably, toward the end of the day, turned aside into the

neighbouring marsh, almost the only one in the countryside, and thence returned to my cordial host, the Elder of Glínnœ, with whom I always stopped. It is not more than two versts from the marsh to Glínnœ; the entire road runs through a valley, and only midway of the distance is one compelled to cross a small hillock. On the crest of this hillock lies a homestead, consisting of one uninhabited little manor-house and a garden. It almost always happened that I passed it at the very acme of the sunset glow, and I remember, that on every such occasion, this house, with its hermetically-sealed windows, appeared to me like a blind old man who had come forth to warm himself in the sunlight. He is sitting, dear man, close to the highway; the splendour of the sunlight has long since been superseded for him by eternal gloom; but he feels it, at least, on his upturned and outstretched face, on his flushed cheeks. It seemed as though no one had lived in the house itself for a long time; but in a tiny detached wing, in the courtyard, lodged a decrepit man who had received his freedom, tall, stooping, and grey-haired, with expressive and impassive features. He was always sitting on a bench in front of the wing's solitary little window, gazing with sad pensiveness into the distance, and when he caught sight of me, he rose a little way and saluted, with that deliberate gravity which distinguishes old house-serfs who have belonged not to the generation of our fathers, but to our grandfathers. I sometimes entered into conversation with him, but he was not loquacious; all I learned from him was that the farm on which he dwelt belonged to the granddaughter of his old master, a widow, who had a younger sister; that both of them lived in towns, and beyond the sea, and never showed themselves at home; that he was anxious to finish his life as speedily as possible, because "you eat and eat bread so that you get melancholy: so long do you eat." This old man's name was Lukyánitch.

One day, for some reason or other, I tarried long in the fields; a very fair amount of game had presented itself, and the day had turned out fine for hunting--from early morning it had been still and grey, as though thoroughly permeated with evening. I wandered far a-field, and it was not only already completely dark, but the moon had risen and night had long been standing in the sky, as the expression runs, when I reached the familiar farm. I had to pass along the garden... All around lay such tranquillity...

I crossed the broad road, cautiously made my way through the dusty nettles, and leaned against the low, wattled hedge.[21] Motionless before me lay the small garden all illuminated and, as it were, soothed to stillness by the silvery rays of the moon,--all fragrant and humid; laid out in ancient fashion, it consisted of a single oblong grass-plot. Straight paths came together exactly in the centre, in a circular flower-bed, thickly overgrown with asters; tall lindens surrounded it in an even border. In one spot only was this border, a couple of fathoms in length, broken, and through the gap a part of the low-roofed house was visible, with two windows lighted, to my amazement. Young apple-trees

reared themselves here and there over the meadow; athwart their slender branches the nocturnal sky gleamed softly blue, and the dreamy light of the moon streamed down; in front of each apple-tree, on the whitening grass, lay its faint, mottled shadow. On one side of the garden the lindens were confusedly green, inundated with motionless, palely-brilliant light; on the other, they stood all black and opaque; a strange, repressed rustling arose at times in their dense foliage; they seemed to be calling to the paths which vanished under them, as though luring them beneath their dim canopy. The whole sky was studded with stars; mysteriously did their soft blue scintillations stream down from on high; they seemed to be gazing with quiet intentness at the distant earth. Small, thin clouds now and then sailed across the moon, momentarily converting its tranquil gleam into an obscure but luminous mist.... Everything was dreaming. The air, all warm, all perfumed, did not even vibrate; it only shivered now and then, as water shivers when disturbed by a falling branch.... One was conscious of a certain thirst, a certain swooning in it... I bent over the fence: a wild scarlet poppy reared its erect little stalk before me from the matted grass; a large, round drop of night dew glittered with a dark gleam in the heart of the open blossom. Everything was dreaming; everything was taking its ease luxuriously round about; everything seemed to be gazing upward, stretching itself out, motionless, expectant... What was it that that warm, not yet sleeping night, was waiting for?

It was waiting for a sound; that sensitive stillness was waiting for a living voice--but everything maintained silence. The nightingales had long since ceased their song ... and the sudden booming of a beetle as it flew past, the light smacking of a tiny fish in the fish-pond behind the lindens at the end of the garden, the sleepy whistle of a startled bird, a distant cry in the fields,--so far away that the ear could not distinguish whether it was a man, or a wild animal, or a bird which had uttered it,--a short, brisk trampling of hoofs on the road: all these faint sounds, these rustlings, only rendered the stillness more profound... My heart yearned within me, with an indefinite feeling, akin not precisely to expectation, nor yet to a memory of happiness. I dared not stir; I was standing motionless before this motionless garden steeped in moonlight and in dew, and, without myself knowing why, was staring importunately at those two windows, which shone dimly red in the soft half-darkness, when suddenly a chord rang out of the house,--rang out and rolled forth in a flood.... The irritatingly-resonant air thundered back an echo.... I gave an involuntary start.

The chord was followed by the sound of a woman's voice... I began to listen eagerly--and ... can I express my amazement?... two years previously, in Italy, at Sorrento, I had heard that selfsame song, that selfsame voice.... Yes, yes...

"Vieni pensando a me segretamente ..."

It was they; I had recognised them; those were the sounds... This is the way it had happened. I was returning home from a long stroll on the seashore. I was walking swiftly along the street; night had long since descended,--a magnificent night, southern, not calm and sadly-pensive as with us, no! but all radiant, sumptuous, and very beautiful, like a happy woman in her bloom; the moon shone with incredible brilliancy; great, radiant stars fairly throbbed in the dark-blue sky; the black shadows were sharply defined against the ground illuminated to yellowness. On both sides of the street stretched the stone walls of gardens; orange-trees reared above them their crooked branches; the golden globes of heavy fruit, hidden amidst the interlacing leaves, were now barely visible, now glowed brightly, as they ostentatiously displayed themselves in the moonlight. On many trees the blossoms shone tenderly white; the air was all impregnated with fragrance languishingly powerful, penetrating, and almost heavy, although inexpressibly sweet.

I walked on, and, I must confess,--having already become accustomed to all these wonders,--I was thinking only of how I might most speedily reach my inn, when suddenly, from a small pavilion, built upon the very wall of a garden along which I was passing, a woman's voice rang out. It was singing some song with which I was unfamiliar, and in its sounds there was something so winning, it seemed so permeated with the passion and joyous expectation expressed by the words of the song, that I instantly and involuntarily halted, and raised my head. There were two windows in the pavilion; but in both the Venetian blinds were lowered, and through their narrow chinks a dull light barely made its way.

After having repeated "_vieni, vieni!_" twice, the voice became silent; the faint sound of strings was audible, as though of a guitar which had fallen on the rug; a gown rustled, the floor creaked softly. The streaks of light in one window disappeared... Some one had approached from within and leaned against it. I advanced a couple of paces. Suddenly the blind clattered and flew open; a graceful woman, all in white, swiftly thrust her lovely head from the window, and stretching out her arms toward me, said: "_Sei tu?_"

I was disconcerted, I did not know what to say; but at that same moment the Unknown threw herself backward with a faint shriek, the blind slammed to, and the light in the pavilion grew still more dim, as though it had been carried out into another room. I remained motionless, and for a long time could not recover myself. The face of the woman who had so suddenly presented itself before me was strikingly beautiful. It had flashed too rapidly before my eyes to permit of my immediately recalling each individual feature; but the general impression was indescribably powerful and profound.... I felt then and there that I should never forget that countenance. The moon fell straight on the wall of the pavilion, on the window whence she had shown herself to me, and, great heavens! how magnificently had her great, dark eyes shone in its

radiance! In what a heavy flood had her half-loosened black hair fallen upon her uplifted, rounded shoulders! How much bashful tenderness there had been in the soft inclination of her form, how much affection in her voice, when she had called to me--in that hurried, but resonant whisper!

After standing for quite a long time on one spot, I at last stepped a little aside, into the shadow of the opposite wall, and began to stare thence at the pavilion with a sort of stupid surprise and anticipation. I listened listened with strained attention... It seemed to me now that I heard some one's quiet breathing behind the darkened window, now a rustle and quiet laughter. At last, steps resounded in the distance ... they came nearer; a man of almost identical stature with myself made his appearance at the end of the street, briskly strode up to a gate directly beneath the pavilion, which I had not previously noticed, knocked twice with its iron ring, without looking about him, waited a little, knocked again, and began to sing in an undertone: "_Ecco ridente_"... The gate opened ... he slipped noiselessly through it. I started, shook my head, threw my hands apart, and pulling my hat morosely down on my brows, went off home in displeasure. On the following day I vainly paced up and down that street for two hours in the very hottest part of the day, past the pavilion, and that same evening went away from Sorrento without even having visited Tasso's house.

The reader can now picture to himself the amazement which suddenly took possession of me, when I heard that same voice, that same song, in the steppes, in one of the most remote parts of Russia.... Now, as then, it was night; now, as then, the voice suddenly rang out from a lighted, unfamiliar room; now, as then, I was alone. My heart began to beat violently within me. "Is not this a dream?" I thought. And lo! again the final "_vieni!_" rang out.... Can it be that the window will open? Can it be that the woman will show herself in it?--The window opened. In the window, a woman showed herself. I instantly recognised her, although a distance of fifty paces lay between us, although a light cloud obscured the moon. It was she, my Unknown of Sorrento.

But she did not stretch forth her bare arms as before: she folded them quietly, and leaning them on the window-sill, began to gaze silently and immovably at some point in the garden. Yes, it was she; those were her never-to-be-forgotten features, her eyes, the like of which I had never beheld. Now, also, an ample white gown enfolded her limbs. She seemed somewhat plumper than in Sorrento. Everything about exhaled an atmosphere of the confidence and repose of love, the triumph of beauty, of calm happiness. For a long time she did not stir, then she cast a glance backward into the room and, suddenly straightening herself up, exclaimed thrice, in a loud and ringing voice: "_Addio!_" The beautiful sounds were wafted far, far away, and for a long time they quivered, growing fainter and dying out beneath the lindens of the garden and in the fields behind me, and everywhere. Everything around me was filled

for several minutes with the voice of this woman, everything rang in response to her,--rang with her. She shut the window, and a few moments later the light in the house vanished.

As soon as I recovered myself--and this was not very soon, I must admit--I immediately directed my course along the garden of the manor, approached the closed gate, and peered through the wattled fence. Nothing out of the ordinary was visible in the courtyard; in one corner, under a shed, stood a calash. Its front half, all bespattered with dried mud, shone out sharply white in the moonlight. The shutters of the house were closed, as before.

I have forgotten to say, that for about a week previous to that day, I had not visited Glínnoe. For more than half an hour I paced to and fro in perplexity in front of the fence, so that, at last, I attracted the attention of the old watch-dog, which, nevertheless, did not begin to bark at me, but merely looked at me from under the gate in a remarkably ironical manner, with his purblind little eyes puckered up. I understood his hint, and beat a retreat. But before I had managed to traverse half a verst, I suddenly heard the sound of a horse's hoofs behind me.... In a few minutes a rider, mounted on a black horse, dashed past me at a swift trot, and swiftly turning toward me his face, where I could descry nothing save an aquiline nose and a very handsome moustache under his military cap, which was pulled well down on his brow, turned into the right-hand road, and immediately vanished behind the forest.

"So that is he," I thought to myself, and my heart stirred within me in a strange sort of way. It seemed to me that I recognised him; his figure really did suggest the figure of the man whom I had seen enter the garden-gate in Sorrento. Half an hour later I was in Glínnoe at my host's, had roused him, and had immediately begun to interrogate him as to the persons who had arrived at the neighbouring farm. He replied with an effort that the ladies had arrived.

"But what ladies?"

"Why, everybody knows what ladies," he replied very languidly.

"Russians?"

"What else should they be?--Russians, of course."

"Not foreigners?"

"Hey?"

"Have they been here long?"

"Not long, of course."

"And have they come to stay long?"

"That I don't know."

"Are they wealthy?"

"And that, too, we don't know. Perhaps they are wealthy."

"Did not a gentleman come with them?"

"A gentleman?"

"Yes, a gentleman."

The Elder sighed.

"O, okh, O Lord!"--he ejaculated with a yawn.... "N-n-o, there was no gentleman, I think there was no gentleman. I don't know!"--he suddenly added.

"And what sort of other neighbours are living here?"

"What sort? everybody knows what sort,--all sorts."

"All sorts?--And what are their names?"

"Whose--the lady proprietors'? or the neighbours'?"

"The lady proprietors'."

Again the Elder yawned.

"What are their names?"--he muttered.--"Why, God knows what their names are! The elder, I think, is named Anna Feódorovna, and the other ... No, I don't know that one's name."

"Well, what 's their surname, at least?"

"Their surname?"

"Yes, their surname, their family name."

"Their family name.... Yes. Why, as God is my witness, I don't know."

"Are they young?"

"Well, no. They are not."

"How old are they, then?"

"Why, the youngest must be over forty."

"Thou art inventing the whole of this."

The Elder was silent for a while.

"Well, you must know best. But I don't know."

"Well, thou art wound up to say one thing!"--I exclaimed with vexation.

Knowing, by experience, that there is no possibility of extracting anything lucid from a Russian man when once he undertakes to answer in that way (and, moreover, my host had only just thrown himself down to sleep, and swayed forward slightly before every answer, opening his eyes widely with child-like surprise, and with difficulty ungluing his lips, smeared with the honey of the first, sweet slumber),--I gave up in despair, and declining supper, went into the barn.

I could not get to sleep for a long time. "Who is she?"--I kept incessantly asking myself:--"a Russian? If a Russian, why does she speak in Italian?.... The Elder declares that she is not young.... But he 's lying.... And who is that happy man?.. Positively, I can comprehend nothing... But what a strange adventure! Is it possible that thus, twice in succession But I will infallibly find out who she is, and why she has come hither."... Agitated by such disordered, fragmentary thoughts as these, I fell asleep late, and saw strange visions.... Now it seems to me that I am wandering in some desert, in the very blaze of noonday--and suddenly, I behold in front of me, a huge spot of shadow running over the red-hot yellow sand... I raise my head--'t is she, my beauty, whisking through the air, all white, with long white wings, and beckoning me to her. I dart after her; but she floats on lightly and swiftly, and I cannot rise from the ground, and stretch out eager hands in vain.... "_Addio!_" she says to me, as she flies away.--"Why hast thou not wings?.. _Addio!_".... And lo, from all sides, "_Addio!_" resounds. Every grain of sand shouts and squeaks at me: "_Addio!_"... then rings out in an intolerable, piercing trill... I brush it aside, as I would a gnat, I seek her with my eyes ... and already she has become a cloud, and is floating upward softly toward the sun; the sun quivers, rocks, laughs, stretches out to meet her long golden threads, and now those threads have enmeshed her, and she melts into them, but I shout at the top of my lungs, like a madman: "That is not the sun, that is not the sun, that is an Italian spider. Who gave it a passport for Russia? I 'll show him up for what he is: I saw him stealing oranges from other people's gardens."... Then it seems to me that I am walking along a narrow mountain path... I hurry onward: I must get somewhere or other as quickly as possible, some unheard-of happiness is awaiting me. Suddenly a vast cliff rears itself up in front of me. I seek a passage; I go to

the right, I go to the left--there is no passage! And now behind the cliff a voice suddenly rings out: "_Passa, passa quei colli._" ... It is calling me, that voice; it repeats its mournful summons. I fling myself about in anguish, I seek even the smallest cleft.... Alas! the cliff is perpendicular, there is granite everywhere.... "_Passa quei colli_," wails the voice again. My heart aches, and I hurl my breast against the smooth stone; I scratch it with my nails, in my frenzy.... A dark passage suddenly opens before me... Swooning with joy, I dash forward... "Nonsense!" some one cries to me:--"thou shalt not pass through.".. I look: Lukyánitch is standing in front of me and threatening, and brandishing his arms... I hastily fumble in my pockets: I want to bribe him; but there is nothing in my pockets....

"Lukyánitch,"--I say to him,--"let me pass; I will reward thee afterward."

"You are mistaken, signor," Lukyánitch replies to me, and his face assumes a strange expression:--"I am not a house-serf; recognise in me Don Quixote de La Mancha, the famous wandering knight; all my life long I have been seeking my Dulcinea--and I have not been able to find her, and I will not tolerate it, that you shall find yours."

"_Passa quei colli_ ".... rings out again the almost sobbing voice.

"Stand aside, signor!"--I shout wrathfully, and am on the point of precipitating myself forward ... but the knight's long spear wounds me in the very heart... I fall dead,.. I lie on my back... I cannot move ... and lo, I see that she is coming with a lamp in her hand, and elevating it with a fine gesture above her head, she peers about her in the gloom, and creeping cautiously up, bends over me...

"So this is he, that jester!" she says with a disdainful laugh.--"This is he who wanted to know who I am!" and the hot oil from her lamp drips straight upon my wounded heart...

"Psyche!"--I exclaim with an effort, and awake.

All night long I slept badly and was afoot before daybreak. Hastily dressing and arming myself, I wended my way straight to the manor. My impatience was so great that the dawn had only just begun to flush the sky when I reached the familiar gate. Round me the larks were singing, the daws were cawing on the birches; but in the house everything was still buried in death-like matutinal slumber. Even the dog was snoring behind the fence. With the anguish of expectation, exasperated almost to the point of wrath, I paced to and fro on the dewy grass, and kept casting incessant glances at the low-roofed and ill-favoured little house which contained within its walls that mysterious being....

Suddenly the wicket-gate creaked faintly, opened, and Lukyánitch made

his appearance on the threshold, in some sort of striped kazák coat. His bristling, long-drawn face seemed to me more surly than ever. Gazing at me not without surprise, he was on the point of shutting the wicket again.

"My good fellow, my good fellow!"--I cried hastily.

"What do you want at such an early hour?"--he returned slowly and dully.

"Tell me, please, they say that your mistress has arrived?"

Lukyánitch made no reply for a while.

"She has arrived..."

"Alone?"

"With her sister."

"Were there not guests with you last night?"

"No."

And he drew the wicket toward him.

"Stay, stay, my dear fellow.... Do me a favour...."

Lukyánitch coughed and shivered with cold.

"But what is it you want?"

"Tell me, please, how old is your mistress?"

Lukyánitch darted a suspicious glance at me.

"How old is the mistress? I don't know. She must be over forty."

"Over forty! And how old is her sister?"

"Why, she 's in the neighbourhood of forty."

"You don't say so! And is she good-looking?"

"Who, the sister?"

"Yes, the sister."

Lukyánitch grinned.

"I don't know; that 's as a person fancies. In my opinion, she is n't comely."

"How so?"

"Because--she 's very ill-favoured. A bit puny."

"You don't say so! And has no one except them come hither?"

"No one. Who should come?"

"But that cannot be!... I"

"Eh, master! there 's no end of talking with you, apparently,"--retorted the old man with vexation.--"Whew, how cold it is! Good-bye."

"Stay, stay here 's something for thee...." And I held out to him a quarter of a ruble which I had prepared beforehand; but my hand came into contact with the swiftly banged wicket-gate. The silver coin fell to the ground, rolled away, and lay at my feet.

"Ah, thou old rascal!"--I thought--"Don Quixote de La Mancha! Evidently, thou hast received orders to hold thy tongue.... But wait, thou shalt not trick me."...

I promised myself that I would elucidate the matter, at any cost. For about half an hour I paced to and fro, without knowing what decision to adopt. At last I made up my mind first to inquire in the village, precisely who had arrived at the manor, and who she was, then to return, and, as the saying runs, not desist until the matter was cleared up.--And if the Unknown should come out of the house, I would, at last, see her by daylight, near at hand, like a living woman, not like a vision.

It was about a verst to the village, and I immediately betook myself thither, stepping out lightly and alertly: a strange audacity was seething and sparkling in my blood; the invigorating freshness of the morning excited me after the uneasy night.--In the village I learned from two peasants, who were on their way to their work, everything which I could learn from them; namely: I learned that the manor, together with the village which I had entered, was called Mikhaílovskoe, that it belonged to the widow of a Major, Anna Feódorovna Shlýkoff; that she had with her her sister, an unmarried woman, Pelagéya Feódorovna Badáeff by name; that both of them were advanced in years, were wealthy, hardly ever lived at home, were always travelling about, kept no one in attendance on them except two female domestic serfs and a male cook; that Anna Feódorovna had recently returned from Moscow with no one but her sister.... This last circumstance greatly perturbed me: it was impossible to assume that the peasants also had been commanded to hold

their peace about my Unknown. But it was utterly impossible to concede that Anna Feódorovna Shlýkoff, a widow of five-and-forty, and that young, charming woman, whom I had seen on the previous evening, were one and the same person. Pelagéya Feódorovna, judging from the description, was not distinguished for her beauty either, and, in addition to that, at the mere thought that the woman whom I had seen at Sorrento could bear the name of Pelagéya, and still more of Badáeff, I shrugged my shoulders and laughed maliciously. And nevertheless, I had beheld her the night before in that house.... I had beheld her, beheld her with my own eyes, I reflected. Irritated, enraged, but still more inclined to stand by my intention, I would have liked to return at once to the manor but glanced at my watch; it was not yet six o'clock. I decided to wait a while. Every one was still asleep at the farm, in all probability ... and to prowl about the house at such an hour would only serve to arouse unnecessary suspicion; and besides, in front of me stretched bushes, and beyond them an aspen wood was visible...

I must do myself the justice to say, that, notwithstanding the thoughts which were exciting me, the noble passion for the hunt had not yet grown wholly mute within me; "perchance," I thought,--"I shall hit upon a covey,--and that will serve to pass away the time." I entered the bushes. But, truth to tell, I walked in a very careless way, quite out of consonance with the rules of the art: I did not follow my dog constantly with my eyes, I did not snort over a thick bush, in the hope that a red-browed black snipe would fly thence with a whirr and a crash, but kept incessantly looking at my watch, which never serves any purpose whatsoever. And, at last, it was going on nine.--"T is time!" I exclaimed aloud, and was on the point of turning back to the manor, when suddenly a huge black woodcock actually did begin to flutter out of the thick grass a couple of paces from me. I fired at the magnificent bird, and wounded it under the wing; it almost fell to the ground, but recovered itself, started off, fluttering its wings swiftly and, diving toward the wood, tried to soar above the first aspens on the edge, but its strength failed, and it rolled headlong into the thicket. It would have been utterly unpardonable to abandon such a prize. I strode briskly after it, entered the forest, made a sign to Dianka, and a few moments later I heard a feeble clucking and flapping; it was the unlucky woodcock, struggling under the paws of my quick-scented hound. I picked it up, put it in my game-bag, glanced round, and--remained rooted to the spot, as it were....

The forest which I had entered was very dense and wild, so that I had with difficulty made my way to the spot where the bird had fallen; but at a short distance from me wound a cart-road, and along this road were riding on horseback my beauty and the man who had overtaken me on the night before; I recognised him by his moustache. They were riding softly, in silence, holding each other by the hand; their horses were barely putting one foot before the other, lazily swaying from side to side and handsomely stretching out their long necks. When I had

recovered from my first alarm ... precisely that, alarm: I can give no other appellation to the feeling which suddenly seized upon me.... I fairly bored into her with my eyes. How beautiful she was! how enchantingly her graceful form moved toward me amid the emerald green! Soft shadows, tender reflections glided over her--over her long grey habit, over her slender, slightly-bent neck, over her faintly-rosy face, over her glossy black hair, which escaped luxuriantly from under her low-crowned hat. But how shall I transmit that expression of utter, passionate bliss of a person passionate to the point of speechlessness, which breathed forth from her features? Her head seemed to be bending beneath the burden of it; moist, golden sparks glittered in her dark eyes, which were half-concealed by her eyelashes; they gazed nowhere, those happy eyes, and the slender brows drooped over them. An irresolute, child-like smile--the smile of profound happiness, strayed over her lips; it seemed as though excess of happiness had wearied and even broken her a little, as a flower in full bloom sometimes breaks its own stem. Both her hands lay powerless: one, in the hand of the man who was riding by her side, the other on her horse's mane.

I succeeded in getting a good look at her--and at him also.... He was a handsome, stately man, with an un-Russian face. He was gazing at her boldly and merrily, and, so far as I was able to observe, was admiring her not without secret pride. He was admiring her, the villain, and was very well-satisfied with himself, and not sufficiently touched, not sufficiently moved,--precisely that, moved... And, as a matter of fact, what man does deserve such devotion, what soul, even the most beautiful, is worthy of furnishing another soul such happiness? I must say, that I was envious of him!.... In the meantime, they had both arrived on a level with me ... my dog suddenly bounded out into the road and began to bark. My Unknown started, cast a swift glance around and, catching sight of me, dealt her steed a violent blow on the neck with her whip. The horse snorted, reared up on his hind legs, threw both his hoofs forward simultaneously, and dashed off at a gallop.... The man immediately gave the spur to his black horse, and when I emerged by the road into the border of the forest a few moments later, both of them were already galloping off into the golden distance, across the fields, rising smartly and regularly in their saddles ... and were not galloping in the direction of the farm....

I gazed.... They speedily disappeared behind a hillock, brilliantly illuminated for the last time by the sun against the dark line of the horizon. I stood, and stood, then returned with slow steps to the forest and sat down on the path, covering my eyes with my hand.--I have observed that after meeting strangers, all that is necessary is to close the eyes--and their features immediately start up before you; any one can verify my observation on the street. The more familiar the faces, the more difficult is it for them to present themselves, the more indefinite is their impression; you recall them, but you do not see them,.... and you can never possibly picture to yourself your own

face.... The very minutest separate feature is known to you, but the entire image will not constitute itself. So then, I sat down, closed my eyes--and immediately beheld the Unknown and her companion, and their horses, and everything.... The man's smiling countenance stood before me with particular sharpness and distinctness. I began to stare intently at it ... it became confused, and dissolved into a sort of crimson mist, and after it, her image also floated away and sank, and would not return.

"Well, never mind!"--I thought;--"at all events, I have seen them, seen them both clearly.... It remains for me now to find out their names." Endeavour to find out their names! What ill-judged, petty curiosity! But I swear that it was not curiosity which had flamed up in me. In truth, it simply seemed to me impossible not to discover, eventually, who they were, after accident had so strangely and so persistently brought us together. Moreover, my former impatient perplexity no longer existed; it had been replaced by a certain confused, sorrowful feeling, of which I was somewhat ashamed.... I was jealous....

I did not hasten back to the farm. I must confess that I had become ashamed to pry into the secrets of others. Moreover, the appearance of the fond pair by daylight, in the light of the sun, although it was unexpected and, I repeat, strange, had not exactly soothed, but chilled me. I no longer found anything supernatural, miraculous in this occurrence nothing resembling an impossible dream....

I began to hunt again with greater assiduity than before; but still, there were no genuine raptures. I hit upon a covey, which engaged my attention for an hour and a half... The young partridges did not respond to my whistle for a long time,--probably because I did not whistle with sufficient "objectivity."--The sun had already risen quite high (my watch indicated twelve o'clock), when I directed my steps toward the manor. I walked without haste. Yonder, at last, the low-roofed little house peeped forth from its hill. I approached and not without secret satisfaction beheld Lukyánitch. As of yore, he was sitting motionless on the bench in front of the wing. The gate was closed--also the shutters.

"Good morning, uncle!"--I shouted to him from afar.--"Hast thou come out to warm thyself?"

Lukyánitch turned his gaunt face toward me and silently doffed his cap.

I went up to him.

"Good morning, uncle, good morning,"--I repeated, wishing to encourage him.--"Why,"--I added, unexpectedly descrying my quarterruble on the ground,--"didst not thou see it?"

And I pointed out to him the silver circle, half peeping from beneath the short grass.

"Yes, I saw it."

"Then why didst thou not pick it up?"

"Because it was n't my money, so I did n't pick it up."

"What a fellow thou art, brother!"--I returned, not without embarrassment, and picking up the coin, I offered it to him again.--"Take it, take it, for tea."

"Much obliged,"--Lukyánitch answered me, with a composed smile.--"It is n't necessary; I 'll manage to pull through without it. Much obliged."

"But I am ready to give you still more, with pleasure!"--I replied in confusion.

"What for? Please don't disturb yourself--much obliged for your good-will, but we still have a crust of bread. And perhaps we sha'n't eat that up--that 's as it may happen."

And he rose, and put out his hand to the wicket-gate.

"Stay, stay, old man,"--I began, almost in desperation;--"how uncommunicative thou art to-day, really.... Tell me, at least, has your mistress risen yet?"

"She has."

"And is she at home?"

"No, she 's not at home."

"Has she gone off on a visit, pray?"

"No, sir; she has gone to Moscow."

"To Moscow! How is that? Why, she was here this morning!"

"She was."

"And she passed the night here?"

"She did."

"And she came hither recently?"

"Yes."

"What next, my good man?"

"Why, this: it must be about an hour since she deigned to start back to Moscow."

"To Moscow!"

I stared in petrification at Lukyánitch; I had not expected this, I admit.

Lukyánitch stared at me.... A crafty, senile smile distended his withered lips and almost beamed in his melancholy eyes.

"And did she go away with her sister?"--I said at last.

"Yes."

"So that now there is no one in the house?"

"No one...."

"This old man is deceiving me,"--flashed through my head.--"T is not without cause that he is grinning so craftily.--Listen, Lukyánitch,"--I said aloud;--"dost wish to do me one favour?"

"What is it you wish?"--he enunciated slowly, evidently beginning to feel annoyed by my questions.

"Thou sayest that there is no one in the house; canst thou show it to me? I should be very grateful to thee."

"That is, you want to inspect the rooms?"

"Yes, the rooms."

Lukyánitch remained silent for a space.

"Very well,"--he said at last.--"Pray, enter...."

And bending down, he stepped across the threshold of the wicket-gate. I followed him. After traversing a tiny courtyard, we ascended the tottering steps of the porch. The old man gave the door a push; there was no lock on it: a cord with a knot stuck out through the key-hole.... We entered the house. It consisted in all of five or six low-ceiled rooms, and, so far as I could make out in the faint light, which streamed sparsely through the rifts in the shutters, the furniture in these rooms was extremely plain and decrepit. In one of them (namely,

in the one which opened on the garden) stood a small, antiquated piano.... I raised its warped lid and struck the keys: a shrill, hissing sound rang out and died feebly away, as though complaining of my audacity. It was impossible to discern from anything that people had recently left the house; it had a dead and stifling sort of smell--the odour of an uninhabited dwelling; here and there, indeed, a discarded paper gave one to understand, by its whiteness, that it had been dropped there recently. I picked up one such bit of paper; it proved to be a scrap of a letter; on one side in a dashing feminine handwriting were scrawled the words "_se taire?_" on the other I made out the word "_bonheur_"... On a small round table near the window stood a nosegay of half-faded flowers in a glass, and a green, rumpled ribbon was lying there also I took that ribbon as a souvenir.--Lukyánitch opened a narrow door, pasted over with wall-paper.

"Here,"--said he, extending his hand:--"this here is the bedroom, and yonder, beyond it, is the room for the maids, and there are no other chambers...."

We returned by way of the corridor.--"And what room is that yonder?"--I asked, pointing at a broad, white door with a lock.

"That?"--Lukyánitch answered me, in a dull voice.--"That 's nothing."

"How so?"

"Because.... 'T is a store-room..." And he started to go into the anteroom.

"A store-room? Cannot I look at it?"...

"What makes you want to do that, master, really?!"--replied Lukyánitch with displeasure.--"What is there for you to look at? Chests, old crockery ... 't is a store-room, and nothing more...."

"All the same, show it to me, please, old man,"--I said, although I was inwardly ashamed of my indecent persistence.--"I should like, you see I should like to have just such a house myself at home, in my village"

I was ashamed: I could not complete the sentence I had begun.

Lukyánitch stood with his grey head bent on his breast, and stared at me askance in a strange sort of way.

"Show it,"--I said.

"Well, as you like,"--he replied at last, got the key, and reluctantly opened the door.

I glanced into the store-room. There really was nothing noteworthy about it. On the walls hung old portraits with gloomy, almost black countenances, and vicious eyes. The floor was strewn with all sorts of rubbish.

"Well, have you seen all you want?"--asked Lukyánitch, gruffly.

"Yes; thanks!"--I hastily replied.

He slammed to the door. I went out into the anteroom, and from the anteroom into the courtyard.

Lukyánitch escorted me, muttering: "Good-bye, sir!" and went off to his own wing.

"But who was the lady visitor at your house last night?"--I called after him:--"I met her this morning in the grove."

I had hoped to daze him with my sudden question, to evoke a thoughtless answer. But the old man merely laughed dully, and slammed the door behind him when he went in.

I retraced my steps to Glínnœ. I felt awkward, like a boy who has been put to shame.

"No,"--I said to myself:--"evidently, I shall not obtain a solution to this puzzle. I'll give it up! I will think no more of all this."

An hour later, I set out on my homeward drive, enraged and irritated.

A week elapsed. Try as I might to banish from me the memory of the Unknown, of her companion, of my meetings with them,--it kept constantly returning, and besieged me with all the importunate persistence of an after-dinner fly.... Lukyánitch, with his mysterious looks and reserved speeches, with his coldly-mournful smile, also recurred incessantly to my memory. The house itself, when I thought of it,--that house itself gazed at me cunningly and stupidly through its half-closed shutters, and seemed to be jeering at me, as though it were saying to me: "And all the same thou shalt not find out anything!" At last I could endure it no longer, and one fine day I drove to Glínnœ, and from Glínnœ set out on foot whither? The reader can easily divine.

I must confess that, as I approached the mysterious manor, I felt a decidedly violent agitation. The exterior of the house had not undergone the slightest change: the same closed windows, the same melancholy and desolate aspect; only, on the bench, in front of the wing, instead of old Lukyánitch, sat some young house-serf or other, of twenty, in a long nankeen kaftan and a red shirt. He was sitting with his curly head

resting on his palm, and dozing, swaying to and fro from time to time, and quivering.

"Good morning, brother!"--I said in a loud voice.

He immediately sprang to his feet and stared at me with widely-opened, panic-stricken eyes.

"Good morning, brother!"--I repeated:--"And where is the old man?"

"What old man?"--said the young fellow, slowly.

"Lukyánitch."

"Ah, Lukyánitch!"--He darted a glance aside.--"Do you want Lukyánitch?"

"Yes, I do. Is he at home?"

"N-no,"--enunciated the young fellow, brokenly,--"he, you know ... how shall I ... tell ... you ... about that"

"Is he ill?"

"No."

"What then?"

"Why, he is n't here at all."

"Why not?"

"Because. Something unpleasant ... happened to him."

"Is he dead?"--I inquired with surprise.

"He strangled himself."

"Strangled himself!"--I exclaimed in affright, and clasped my hands.

We both gazed in each other's eyes in silence.

"How long ago?"--I said at last.

"Why, to-day is the fifth day since. They buried him yesterday."

"But why did he strangle himself?"

"The Lord knows. He was a freeman, on wages; he did not know want, the masters petted him as though he were a relation. For we have such good

masters--may God give them health! I simply can't understand what came over him. Evidently, the Evil One entrapped him."

"But how did he do it?"

"Why, so. He took and strangled himself."

"And nothing of the sort had been previously noticed in him?"

"How shall I tell you.... There was nothing particular. He was always a very melancholy man. He used to groan, and groan. 'I 'm so bored,' he would say. Well, and then there was his age. Of late, he really did begin to meditate something. He used to come to us in the village; for I 'm his nephew.--'Well, Vása, my lad,' he would say, 'prithee, brother, come and spend the night with me!!--'What for, uncle?--'Why, because I 'm frightened, somehow; 't is tiresome alone.' Well, and so I 'd go to him. He would come out into the courtyard and stare and stare so at the house, and shake and shake his head, and how he would sigh!... Just before that night, that is to say, the one on which he put an end to his life, he came to us again, and invited me. Well, and so I went. When we reached his wing, he sat for a while on the bench; then he rose, and went out. I wait, and 'he 's rather long in coming back!--says I, and went out into the courtyard, and shouted, 'Uncle! hey, uncle!' My uncle did not call back. Thinks I: 'Whither can he have gone? surely, not into the house?' and I went into the house. Twilight was already drawing on. And as I was passing the store-room, I heard something scratching there, behind the door; so I took and opened the door. Behold, there he sat doubled up under the window.

""What art thou doing there, uncle?" says I. But he turns round, and how he shouts at me, and his eyes are so keen, so keen, they fairly blaze, like a cat's.

""What dost thou want? Dost not see--I am shaving myself.' And his voice was so hoarse. My hair suddenly rose upright, and I don't know why I got frightened ... evidently, about that time the devils had already assailed him.

""What, in the dark?"--says I, and my knees fairly shook.

"Come,' says he, 'it 's all right, begone!'

"I went, and he came out of the store-room and locked the door. So we went back to the wing, and the terror immediately left me.

""What wast thou doing in the store-room, uncle?" says I.--He was fairly frightened.

""Hold thy tongue!" says he; 'hold thy tongue!' and he crawled up on the

oven-bench.

"Well,' thinks I to myself,--'t will be better for me not to speak to him; he surely must be feeling ill to-day.' So I went and lay down on the oven-bench myself, too. And a night-light was burning in a corner. So, I am lying there, and just dozing, you know ... when suddenly I hear the door creaking softly ... and it opens--so, a little. And my uncle was lying with his back to the door, and, as you may remember, he was always a little hard of hearing. But this time he sprang up suddenly...

"Who 's calling me, hey? who is it? hast come for me, for me?!" and out he ran into the yard without his hat....

"I thought: 'What 's the matter with him?' and, sinful man that I am, I fell asleep immediately. The next morning I woke up and Lukyánitch was not there.

"I went out of doors and began to call him--he was nowhere. I asked the watchman:

"Has n't my uncle come out?' says I.

"No,' says he, 'I have n't seen him.'...

"Has n't something happened to him, brother?'.... says I...

"Oï!.... We were both fairly frightened.

"Come, Feodósyeitch,' says I, 'come on,' says I,--'let 's see whether he is n't in the house.'

"Come on,'--says he, 'Vasíly Timofyéitch!' but he himself was as white as clay.

"We entered the house... I was about to pass the store-room, but I glanced and the padlock was hanging open on the hasp, and I pushed the door, but the door was fastened inside.... Feodósyeitch immediately ran round, and peeped in at the window.

"Vasíly Timofyéitch!' he cries;--'his legs are hanging, his legs ...'

"I ran to the window. And they were his legs, Lukyánitch's legs. And he had hanged himself in the middle of the room.--Well, we sent for the judge.... They took him down from the rope; the rope was tied with twelve knots."

"Well, what did the court say?"

"What did the court say? Nothing. They pondered and pondered what the

cause might be. There was no cause. And so they decided that he must have been out of his mind. His head had been aching of late, he had been complaining very frequently of his head...."

I chatted for about half an hour longer with the young fellow, and went away, at last, completely disconcerted. I must confess that I could not look at that rickety house without a secret, superstitious terror.... A month later I quitted my country-seat, and little by little all these horrors, these mysterious encounters, vanished from my mind.

II

Three years passed. The greater part of that time I spent in Petersburg and abroad; and even when I did run down to my place in the country, it was only for a few days at a time, so that I never chanced to be in Glínnoe or in Mikhaïlovskoe on a single occasion. Nowhere had I seen my beauty nor the man. One day, toward the end of the third year, in Moscow, I chanced to meet Madame Shlýkoff and her sister, Pelagéya Badáeff--that same Pelagéya whom I, sinful man that I am, had hitherto regarded as a mythical being--at an evening gathering in the house of one of my acquaintances. Neither of the ladies was any longer young, and both possessed pleasing exteriors; their conversation was characterised by wit and mirth: they had travelled a great deal, and travelled with profit; easy gaiety was observable in their manners. But they and my acquaintance had positively nothing in common. I was presented to them. Madame Shlýkoff and I dropped into conversation (her sister was being entertained by a passing geologist). I informed her that I had the pleasure of being her neighbour in *** county.

"Ah! I really do possess a small estate there,"--she remarked,--"near Glínnoe."

"Exactly, exactly,"--I returned:--"I know your Mikhaïlovskoe. Do you ever go thither?"

"I?--Rarely."

"Were you there three years ago?"

"Stay! I think I was. Yes, I was, that is true."

"With your sister, or alone?"

She darted a glance at me.

"With my sister. We spent about a week there. On business, you know. However, we saw no one."

"H'm.... I think there are very few neighbours there."

"Yes, very few. I 'm not fond of neighbours."

"Tell me,"--I began;--"I believe you had a catastrophe there that same year. Lukyánitch"

Madame Shlýkoff's eyes immediately filled with tears.

"And did you know him?"--she said with vivacity.--"Such a misfortune! He was a very fine, good old man ... and just fancy, without any cause, you know"

Madame Shlýkoff's sister approached us. She was, in all probability, beginning to be bored by the learned disquisitions of the geologist about the formation of the banks of the Volga.

"Just fancy, Pauline,"--began my companion;--"monsieur knew Lukyánitch."

"Really? Poor old man!"

"I hunted more than once in the environs of Mikhaïlovskoe at that period, when you were there three years ago,"--I remarked.

"I?"--returned Pelagéya, in some astonishment.

"Well, yes, of course!"--hastily interposed her sister; "is it possible that thou dost not recall it?"

And she looked her intently in the eye.

"Akh, yes, yes ... that is true!"--replied Pelagéya, suddenly.

"Ehe--he!" I thought: "I don't believe you were in Mikhaïlovskoe, my dear."

"Will not you sing us something, Pelagéya Feódorovna?"--suddenly began a tall young man, with a crest of fair hair and turbidly-sweet little eyes.

"Really, I don't know,"--said Miss Badáeff.

"And do you sing?"--I exclaimed with vivacity, springing up briskly from my seat. "For heaven's sake akh, for heaven's sake, do sing us something."

"But what shall I sing to you?"

"Don't you know,"--I began, using my utmost endeavours to impart to my

face an indifferent and easy expression,--"an Italian song ... it begins this way: _'Passa quei colli' _?"

"Yes," replied Pelagéya with perfect innocence. "Do you want me to sing that? Very well."

And she seated herself at the piano. I, like Hamlet, riveted my eyes on Madame Shlykoff. It seemed to me that at the first note she gave a slight start; but she sat quietly to the end. Miss Badáeff sang quite well. The song ended, the customary plaudits resounded. They began to urge her to sing something else; but the two sisters exchanged glances, and a few minutes later they took their departure. As they left the room I overheard the word "_importun _."

"I deserved it!" I thought--and did not meet them again.

Still another year elapsed. I transferred my residence to Petersburg. Winter arrived; the masquerades began. One day, as I emerged at eleven o'clock at night from the house of a friend, I felt myself in such a gloomy frame of mind that I decided to betake myself to the masquerade in the Assembly of the Nobility.[22] For a long time I roamed about among the columns and past the mirrors with a discreetly-fatalistic expression on my countenance--with that expression which, so far as I have observed, makes its appearance in such cases on the faces of the most well-bred persons--why, the Lord only knows. For a long time I roamed about, now and then parrying with a jest the advances of divers shrill dominoes with suspicious lace and soiled gloves, and still more rarely addressing them. For a long time I surrendered my ears to the blare of the trumpets and the whining of the violins; at last, being pretty well bored, I was on the point of going home and and remained. I caught sight of a woman in a black domino, leaning against a column,--and no sooner had I caught sight of her than I stopped short, stepped up to her, and ... will the reader believe me?.... immediately recognised in her my Unknown. How I recognised her: whether by the glance which she abstractedly cast upon me through the oblong aperture in her mask, or by the wonderful outlines of her shoulders and arms, or by the peculiarly feminine stateliness of her whole form, or, in conclusion, by some secret voice which suddenly spoke in me,--I cannot say only, recognise her I did. With a quiver in my heart, I walked past her several times. She did not stir; in her attitude there was something so hopelessly sorrowful that, as I gazed at her, I involuntarily recalled two lines of a Spanish romance:

Soy un cuadro de tristeza,
Arrimado a la pared.[23]

I stepped behind the column against which she was leaning, and bending my head down to her very ear, enunciated softly:

"_Passa quei colli._"...

She began to tremble all over, and turned swiftly round to me. Our eyes met at very short range, and I was able to observe how fright had dilated her pupils. Feebly extending one hand in perplexity, she gazed at me.

"On May 6, 184*, in Sorrento, at ten o'clock in the evening, in della Croce Street,"--I said in a deliberate voice, without taking my eyes from her; "afterward, in Russia, in the *** Government, in the hamlet of Mikhaïlovskoe, on June 22, 184*."....

I said all this in French. She recoiled a little, scanned me from head to foot with a look of amazement, and whispering, "_Venez_," swiftly left the room. I followed her.

We walked on in silence. It is beyond my power to express what I felt as I walked side by side with her. It was as though a very beautiful dream had suddenly become reality ... as though the statue of Galatea had descended as a living woman from its pedestal in the sight of the swooning Pygmalion.... I could not believe it, I could hardly breathe.

We traversed several rooms.... At last, in one of them, she paused in front of a small divan near the window, and seated herself. I sat down beside her.

She slowly turned her head toward me, and looked intently at me.

"Do you do you come from _him_?" she said.

Her voice was weak and unsteady...

Her question somewhat disconcerted me.

"No not from him,"--I replied haltingly.

"Do you know him?"

"Yes,"--I replied, with mysterious solemnity. I wanted to keep up my rôle.--"Yes, I know him."

She looked distrustfully at me, started to say something, and dropped her eyes.

"You were waiting for him in Sorrento,"--I went on;--"you met him at Mikhaïlovskoe, you rode on horseback with him...."

"How could you" she began.

"I know ... I know all...."

"Your face seems familiar to me, somehow,"--she continued:--"but no"

"No, I am a stranger to you."

"Then what is it that you want?"

"I know that also,"--I persisted.

I understood very well that I must take advantage of the excellent beginning to go further, that my repetitions of "I know all, I know," were becoming ridiculous--but my agitation was so great, that unexpected meeting had thrown me into such confusion, I had lost my self-control to such a degree that I positively was unable to say anything else. Moreover, I really knew nothing more. I felt conscious that I was talking nonsense, felt conscious that, from the mysterious, omniscient being which I must at first appear to her to be, I should soon be converted into a sort of grinning fool but there was no help for it.

"Yes, I know all,"--I muttered once more.

She darted a glance at me, rose quickly to her feet, and was on the point of departing.

But this was too cruel. I seized her hand.

"For God's sake,"--I began,--"sit down, listen to me...."

She reflected, and seated herself.

"I just told you,"--I went on fervently,--"that I knew everything--that is nonsense. I know nothing; I do not know either who you are, or who he is, and if I have been able to surprise you by what I said to you a while ago by the column, you must ascribe that to chance alone, to a strange, incomprehensible chance, which, as though in derision, has brought me in contact with you twice, and almost in identically the same way on both occasions, and has made me the involuntary witness of that which, perhaps, you would like to keep secret...."

And thereupon, without the slightest circumlocution, I related to her everything: my meetings with her in Sorrento, in Russia, my futile inquiries in Mikhaïlovskoe, even my conversation in Moscow with Madame Shlýkoff and her sister.

"Now you know everything,"--I went on, when I had finished my story.--"I will not undertake to describe to you what an overwhelming impression

you made on me: to see you and not to be bewitched by you is impossible. On the other hand, there is no need for me to tell you what the nature of that impression was. Remember under what conditions I beheld you both times.... Believe me, I am not fond of indulging in senseless hopes, but you must understand also that inexpressible agitation which has seized upon me to-day, and you must pardon the awkward artifice to which I decided to have recourse in order to attract your attention, if only for a moment"

She listened to my confused explanations without raising her head.

"What do you want of me?"--she said at last.

"I?... I want nothing ... I am happy as I am.... I have too much respect for such secrets."

"Really? But, up to this point, apparently However,"--she went on,--"I will not reproach you. Any man would have done the same in your place. Moreover, chance really has brought us together so persistently ... that would seem to give you a certain right to frankness on my part. Listen: I am not one of those uncomprehended and unhappy women who go to masquerades for the sake of chattering to the first man they meet about their sufferings, who require hearts filled with sympathy.... I require sympathy from no one; my own heart is dead, and I have come hither in order to bury it definitively."

She raised a handkerchief to her lips.

"I hope"--she went on with a certain amount of effort--"that you do not take my words for the ordinary effusions of a masquerade. You must understand that I am in no mood for that...."

And, in truth, there was something terrible in her voice, despite all the softness of its tones.

"I am a Russian,"--she said in Russian;--up to that point she had expressed herself in the French language:--"although I have lived little in Russia.... It is not necessary for me to know your name. Anna Feódorovna is an old friend of mine; I really did go to Mikhaïlovskoe under the name of her sister... It was impossible at that time for me to meet him openly... And even without that, rumours had begun to circulate ... at that time, obstacles still existed--he was not free... Those obstacles have disappeared ... but he whose name should become mine, he with whom you saw me, has abandoned me."

She made a gesture with her hand, and paused awhile....

"You really do not know him? You have not met him?"

"Not once."

"He has spent almost all this time abroad. But he is here now.... That is my whole history,"--she added;--"you see, there is nothing mysterious about it, nothing peculiar."

"And Sorrento?"--I timidly interposed.

"I made his acquaintance in Sorrento,"--she answered slowly, becoming pensive.

Both of us held our peace. A strange discomposure took possession of me. I was sitting beside her, beside that woman whose image had so often flitted through my dreams, had so torturingly agitated and irritated me,--I was sitting beside her and felt a cold and a weight at my heart. I knew that nothing would come of that meeting, that between her and me there was a gulf, that when we parted we should part forever. With her head bowed forward and both hands lying in her lap, she sat there indifferent and careless. I know that carelessness of incurable grief, I know that indifference of irrecoverable happiness! The masks strolled past us in couples; the sounds of the "monotonous and senseless" waltz now reverberated dully in the distance, now were wafted by in sharp gusts; the merry ball-music agitated me heavily and mournfully. "Can it be,"--I thought,--"that this woman is the same who appeared to me once on a time in the window of that little country house far away, in all the splendour of triumphant beauty?...." And yet, time seemed not to have touched her. The lower part of her face, unconcealed by the lace of her mask, was of almost childish delicacy; but a chill emanated from her, as from a statue.... Galatea had returned to her pedestal, and would descend from it no more.

Suddenly she drew herself up, darted a glance into the next room, and rose.

"Give me your arm,"--she said to me. "Let us go away quickly, quickly."

We returned to the ball-room. She walked so fast that I could barely keep up with her. She came to a standstill beside one of the columns.

"Let us wait here,"--she whispered.

"Are you looking for any one?"--I began....

But she paid no heed to me: her eager gaze was fixed upon the crowd. Languidly and menacingly did her great black eyes look forth from beneath the black velvet.

I turned in the direction of her gaze and understood everything. Along the corridor formed by the row of columns and the wall, he was walking,

that man whom I had met with her in the forest. I recognised him instantly: he had hardly changed at all. His golden-brown moustache curled as handsomely as ever, his brown eyes beamed with the same calm and self-confident cheerfulness as of yore. He was walking without haste, and, lightly bending his slender figure, was narrating something to a woman in a domino, whose arm was linked in his. As he came on a level with us, he suddenly raised his head, looked first at me, then at the woman with whom I was standing, and probably recognised her eyes, for his eyebrows quivered slightly,--he screwed up his eyes, and a barely perceptible, but intolerably insolent smile hovered over his lips. He bent down to his companion, and whispered a couple of words in her ear; she immediately glanced round, her blue eyes hastily scanned us both, and with a soft laugh she menaced him with her little hand. He slightly shrugged one shoulder, she nestled up to him coquettishly...

I turned to my Unknown. She was gazing after the receding pair, and suddenly, tearing her arm from mine, she rushed toward the door. I was about to dash after her; but turning round, she gave me such a look that I made her a profound bow, and remained where I was. I understood that to pursue her would be both rude and stupid.

"Tell me, please, my dear fellow,"--I said, half an hour later, to one of my friends--the living directory of Petersburg:--"who is that tall, handsome gentleman with a moustache?"

"That?... that is some foreigner or other, a rather enigmatic individual, who very rarely makes his appearance on our horizon. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, because!"....

I returned home. Since that time I have never met my Unknown anywhere. Had I known the name of the man whom she loved, I might, probably, have found out, eventually, who she was, but I myself did not desire that. I have said above that that woman appeared to me like a dream-vision--and like a dream-vision she went past and vanished forever.

FOOTNOTES:

[20] Pass through these hills and come cheerily to me: care thou not for too great a company. Come thou, and think secretly of me, that I may be thy comrade all the way.

[21] In central and southern Russia where timber is scarce, fences, and even the walls of barns and store-houses, are made of interlaced boughs.--TRANSLATOR.

[22] The Nobles' Club.--TRANSLATOR.

"I am a picture of sorrow,
Leaning against the wall."

BACK PAY

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Vertical City*, by Fannie Hurst

I set out to write a love story, and for the purpose sharpened a bright-pink pencil with a glass ruby frivolously at the eraser end.

Something sweet. Something dainty. A candied rose leaf after all the bitter war lozenges. A miss. A kiss. A golf stick. A motor car. Or, if need be, a bit of khaki, but without one single spot of blood or mud, and nicely pressed as to those fetching peg-top trouser effects where they wing out just below the skirt-coat. The oldest story in the world told newly. No wear out to it. Editors know. It's as staple as eggs or printed lawn or ipecac. The good old-fashioned love story with the above-mentioned miss, kiss, and, if need be for the sake of timeliness, the bit of khaki, pressed.

Just my luck that, with one of these modish tales at the tip of my pink pencil, Hester Bevins should come pounding and clamoring at the door of my mental reservation, quite drowning out the rather high, the lippy, and, if I do say it myself, distinctly musical patter of Arline. That was to have been her name. Arline Kildane. Sweet, don't you think, and with just a bit of wild Irish rose in it?

But Hester Bevins would not let herself be gainsaid, sobbing a little, elbowing her way through the group of mental unborns, and leaving me to blow my pitch pipe for a minor key.

Not that Hester's isn't one of the oldest stories in the world, too. No matter how newly told, she is as old as sin, and sin is but a few weeks younger than love--and how often the two are interchangeable!

If it be a fact that the true lady is, in theory, either a virgin or a lawful wife, then Hester Bevins stands immediately convicted on two charges.

She was neither. The most that can be said for her is that she was honestly what she was.

"If the wages of sin is death," she said to a roadhouse party of roysterers one dawn, "then I've quite a bit of back pay coming to me." And joined in the shout that rose off the table.

I can sketch her in for you rather simply because of the hackneyed lines of her very, very old story. Whose pasts so quickly mold and disintegrate as those of women of Hester's stripe? Their yesterdays are entirely soluble in the easy waters of their to-days.

For the first seventeen years of her life she lived in what we might call Any American Town of, say, fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants. Her particular one was in Ohio. Demopolis, I think. One of those change-engine-and-take-on-water stops with a stucco art-nouveau station, a roof drooping all round it, as if it needed to be shaved off like edges of a pie, and the name of the town writ in conch shells on a green slant of terrace. You know--the kind that first establishes a ten-o'clock curfew for its young, its dance halls and motion-picture theaters, and then sends in a hurry call for a social-service expert from one of the large Eastern cities to come and diagnose its malignant vice undergrowth.

Hester Bevins, of a mother who died bearing her and one of those disappearing fathers who can speed away after the accident without even stopping to pick up the child or leave a license number, was reared--no, grew up, is better--in the home of an aunt. A blond aunt with many gold teeth and many pink and blue wrappers.

Whatever Hester knew of the kind of home that fostered her, it left apparently no welt across her sensibilities. It was a rather poor house, an unpainted frame in a poor street, but there was never a lack of gayety or, for that matter, any pinching lack of funds. It was an actual fact that, at thirteen, cotton or lisle stockings brought out a little irritated rash on Hester's slim young legs, and she wore silk. Abominations, it is true, at three pair for a dollar, that sprang runs and would not hold a darn, but, just the same, they were silk. There was an air of easy _camaraderie_ and easy money about that house. It was not unusual for her to come home from school at high noon and find a front-room group of one, two, three, or four guests, almost invariably men. Frequently these guests handed her out as much as half a dollar for candy money, and not another child in school reckoned in more than pennies.

Once a guest, for reasons of odd change, I suppose, handed her out thirteen cents. Outraged, at the meanness of the sum, and with an early and deep-dyed superstition of thirteen, she dashed the coins out of his hand and to the four corners of the room, escaping in the guffaw of laughter that went up.

Often her childish sleep in a small top room with slanting sides would be broken upon by loud ribaldry that lasted into dawn, but never by word, and certainly not by deed, was she to know from her aunt any of its sordid significance.

Literally, Hester Bevins was left to feather her own nest. There were no demands made upon her. Once, in the little atrocious front parlor of horsehair and chromo, one of the guests, the town baggage-master, to be exact, made to embrace her, receiving from the left rear a sounding smack across cheek and ear from the aunt.

"Cut that! Hester, go out and play! Whatever she's got to learn from life, she can't say she learned it in my house."

There were even two years of high school, and at sixteen, when she went, at her own volition, to clerk in Finley's two-story department store on High Street, she was still innocent, although she and Gerald Fishback were openly sweethearts.

Gerald was a Thor. Of course, you are not to take that literally; but if ever there was a carnification of the great god himself, then Gerald was in his image. A wide streak of the Scandinavian ran through his make-up, although he had been born in Middletown, and from there had come recently to the Finley Dry Goods Company as an accountant.

He was so the viking in his bigness that once, on a picnic, he had carried two girls, screaming their fun, across twenty feet of stream. Hester was one of them.

It was at this picnic, the Finley annual, that he asked Hester, then seventeen, to marry him. She was darkly, wildly pretty, as a rambler rose tugging at its stem is restlessly pretty, as a pointed little gazelle smelling up at the moon is whimsically pretty, as a runaway stream from off the flank of a river is naughtily pretty, and she wore a crisp percale shirt waist with a saucy bow at the collar, fifty-cent silk stockings, and already she had almond incarnadine nails with points to them.

They were in the very heart of Wallach's Grove, under a natural cathedral of trees, the noises of the revelers and the small explosions of soda-water and beer bottles almost remote enough for perfect quiet. He was stretched his full and splendid length at the picknickers' immemorial business of plucking and sucking grass blades, and she seated very trimly, her little blue-serge skirt crawling up ever so slightly to reveal the silken ankle, on a rock beside him.

"Tickle-tickle!" she cried, with some of that irrepressible animal spirit of hers, and leaning to brush his ear with a twig.

He caught at her hand.

"Hester," he said, "marry me."

She felt a foaming through her until her finger tips sang.

"Well, I like that!" was what she said, though, and flung up a pointed profile that was like that same gazelle's smelling the moon.

He was very darkly red, and rose to his knees to clasp her about the waist. She felt like relaxing back against his blondness and feeling her fingers plow through the great double wave of his hair. But she did not.

"You're too poor," she said.

He sat back without speaking for a long minute.

"Money isn't everything," he said, finally, and with something gone from his voice.

"I know," she said, looking off; "but it's a great deal if you happen to want it more than anything else in the world."

"Then, if that's how you feel about it, Hester, next to wanting you, I want it, too, more than anything else in the world."

"There's no future in bookkeeping."

"I know a fellow in Cincinnati who's a hundred-and-fifty-dollar man. Hester? Dear?"

"A week?"

"Why, of course not, dear--a month!"

"Faugh!" she said, still looking off.

He felt out for her hand, at the touch of her reddening up again.

"Hester," he said, "you're the most beautiful, the most exciting, the most maddening, the most--the most everything girl in the world! You're not going to have an easy time of it, Hester, with your--your environment and your dangerousness, if you don't settle down--quick, with some strong fellow to take care of you. A fellow who loves you. That's me, Hester. I want to make a little home for you and protect you. I can't promise you the money--right off, but I can promise you the bigger something from the very start, Hester. Dear?"

She would not let her hand relax to his.

"I hate this town," she said.

"There's Cincinnati. Maybe my friend could find an opening there."

"Faugh!"

"Cincinnati, dear, is a metropolis."

"No, no! You don't understand. I hate littleness. Even little metropolises. Cheapness. I hate little towns and little spenders and mercerized stockings and cotton lisle next to my skin, and machine-stitched nightgowns. Ugh! it scratches!"

"And I--I just love you in those starched white shirt waists, Hester. You're beautiful."

"That's just the trouble. It satisfies you, but it suffocates me. I've got a pink-crêpe-de-Chine soul. Pink crêpe de Chine--you hear?"

He sat back on his heels.

"It--Is it true, then, Hester that--that you're making up with that salesman from New York?"

"Why," she said, coloring--"why, I've only met him twice walking up High Street, evenings!"

"But it is true, isn't it, Hester?"

"Say, who was answering your questions this time last year?"

"But it is true, isn't it, Hester? Isn't it?"

"Well, of all the nerve!"

But it was.

* * * * *

The rest tells glibly. The salesman, who wore blue-and-white-striped soft collars with a bar pin across the front, does not even enter the story. He was only a stepping-stone. From him the ascent or descent, or whatever you choose to call it, was quick and sheer.

Five years later Hester was the very private, the very exotic, manicured, coiffured, scented, svelt, and strictly de-luxe chattel of one Charles G. Wheeler, of New York City and Rosencranz, Long Island, vice-president of the Standard Tractor Company, a member of no clubs but of the Rosencranz church, three lodges, and several corporations.

You see, there is no obvious detail lacking. Yes, there was an apartment. "Flat" it becomes under their kind of tenancy, situated on the windiest bend of Riverside Drive and minutely true to type from

the pale-blue and brocade vernis-Martin parlor of talking-machine, mechanical piano, and cellarette built to simulate a music cabinet, to the pink-brocaded bedroom with a _chaise-longue_ piled high with a small mountain of lace pillowettes that were liberally interlarded with paper-bound novels, and a spacious, white-marble adjoining bathroom with a sunken tub, rubber-sheeted shower, white-enamel weighing scales, and overloaded medicine chest of cosmetic array in frosted bottles, sleeping-, headache-, sedative powders, _et al_. There were also a negro maid, two Pomeranian dogs, and last, but by no means least, a private telephone inclosed in a hall closet and lighted by an electric bulb that turned on automatically to the opening of the door.

There was nothing sinister about Wheeler. He was a rather fair exponent of that amazing genus known as "typical New-Yorker," a roll of money in his pocket, and a roll of fat at the back of his neck. He went in for light checked suits, wore a platinum-and-Oriental-pearl chain across his waistcoat, and slept at a Turkish bath once a week; was once named in a large corporation scandal, escaping indictment only after violent and expensive skirmishes; could be either savage or familiar with waiters; wore highly manicured nails, which he regarded frequently in public, white-silk socks only; and maintained, on a twenty-thousand-a-year scale in the decorous suburb of Rosencranz, a decorous wife and three children, and, like all men of his code, his ethics were strictly double decked. He would not permit his nineteen-year-old daughter Marion so much as a shopping tour to the city without the chaperonage of her mother or a friend, forbade in his wife, a comely enough woman with a white unmarcelled coiffure and upper arms a bit baggy with withering flesh, even the slightest of shirtwaist V's unless filled in with net, and kept up, at an expense of no less than fifteen thousand a year--thirty the war year that tractors jumped into the war-industry class--the very high-priced, -tempered, -handed, and -stepping Hester of wild-gazelle charm.

Not that Hester stepped much. There were a long underslung roadster and a great tan limousine with yellow-silk curtains at the call of her private telephone.

The Wheeler family used, not without complaint, a large open car of very early vintage, which in winter was shut in with flapping curtains with isinglass peepers, and leaked cold air badly.

On more than one occasion they passed on the road--these cars. The long tan limousine with the shock absorbers, foot warmers, two brown Pomeranian dogs, little case of enamel-top bottles, fresh flowers, and outside this little jewel-case interior, smartly exposed, so that the blast hit him from all sides, a chauffeur in uniform that harmonized nicely with the tans and yellows. And then the grotesque caravan of the Azoic motor age, with its flapping curtains and ununiformed youth in visored cap at the wheel.

There is undoubtedly an unsavory aspect to this story. For purpose of fiction, it is neither fragrant nor easily digested. But it is not so unsavory as the social scheme which made it possible for those two cars to pass thus on the road, and, at the same time, Charles G. Wheeler to remain the unchallenged member of the three lodges, the corporations, and the Rosencranz church, with a memorial window in his name on the left side as you enter, and again his name spelled out on a brass plate at the end of a front pew.

No one but God and Mrs. Wheeler knew what was in her heart. It is possible that she did not know what the world knew, but hardly. That she endured it is not admirable, but then there were the three children, and, besides, she lived in a world that let it go at that. And so she continued to hold up her head in her rather poor, mute way, rode beside her husband to funerals, weddings, and to the college Commencement of their son at Yale. Scrimped a little, cried a little, prayed a little in private, but outwardly lived the life of the smug in body and soul.

But the Wheelers' is another story, also a running social sore; but it was Hester, you remember, who came sobbing and clamoring to be told.

As Wheeler once said of her, she was a darn fine clothes horse. There was no pushed-up line of flesh across the middle of her back, as the corsets did it to Mrs. Wheeler. She was honed to the ounce. The white-enameled weighing scales, the sweet oils, the flexible fingers of her masseur, the dumb-bells, the cabinet, salt-water, needle-spray, and vapor baths saw to that. Her skin, unlike Marion Wheeler's, was unfreckled, and as heavily and tropically white as a magnolia leaf, and, of course, she reddened her lips, and the moonlike pallor came out more than ever.

As I said, she was frankly what she was. No man looked at her more than once without knowing it. To use an awkward metaphor, it was before her face like an overtone; it was an invisible caul. The wells of her eyes were muddy with it.

But withal, she commanded something of a manner, even from Wheeler. He had no key to the apartment. He never entered her room without knocking. There were certain of his friends she would not tolerate, from one or another aversion, to be party to their not infrequent carousals. Men did not always rise from their chairs when she entered a room, but she suffered few liberties from them. She was absolutely indomitable in her demands.

"Lord!" ventured Wheeler, upon occasion, across a Sunday-noon, lace-spread breakfast table, when she was slim and cool fingered in orchid-colored draperies, and his newest gift of a six-carat, pear-shaped diamond blazing away on her right hand. "Say, aren't these

Yvette bills pretty steep?

"One midnight-blue-and-silver gown \$485.00
One blue-and-silver head bandeau 50.00
One serge-and-satin trotteur gown 275.00
One ciel-blue tea gown 280.00

"Is that the cheapest you can drink tea? Whew!"

She put down her coffee cup, which she usually held with one little finger poised elegantly outward as if for flight.

"You've got a nerve!" she said, rising and pushing back her chair. "Over whose ticker are you getting quotations that I come cheap?"

He was immediately conciliatory, rising also to enfold her in an embrace that easily held her slightness.

"Go on," he said. "You could work me for the Woolworth Building in diamonds if you wanted it badly enough."

"Funny way of showing it! I may be a lot of things, Wheeler, but I'm not cheap. You're darn lucky that the war is on and I'm not asking for a French car."

He crushed his lips to hers.

"You devil!" he said.

There were frequent parties. Dancing at Broadway cabarets, all-night joy rides, punctuated with road-house stop-overs, and not infrequently, in groups of three or four couples, ten-day pilgrimages to showy American spas.

"Getting boiled out," they called it. It was part of Hester's scheme for keeping her sveltness.

Her friendships were necessarily rather confined to a definite circle--within her own apartment house, in fact. On the floor above, also in large, bright rooms of high rental, and so that they were exchanging visits frequently during the day, often *_en déshabillé_*, using the stairway that wound up round the elevator shaft, lived a certain Mrs. Kitty Drew, I believe she called herself. She was plump and blond, and so very scented that her aroma lay on a hallway for an hour after she had scurried through it. She was well known and chiefly distinguished by a large court-plaster crescent which she wore on her left shoulder blade. She enjoyed the bounty of a Wall Street broker who for one day had attained the conspicuousness of cornering the egg market.

There were two or three others within this group. A Mrs. Denison, half French, and a younger girl called Babe. But Mrs. Drew and Hester were intimates. They dwaddled daily in one or the other's apartment, usually lazy and lacy with negligée, lounging about on the mounds of lingerie pillows over chocolates, cigarettes, novels, Pomeranians, and always the headache powders, nerve sedatives, or smelling salts, a running line of: "Lord! I've a head!" "I need a good cry for the blues!" "Talk about a dark-brown taste!" or, "There was some kick to those cocktails last night," through their conversation.

KITTY: "Br-r-r! I'm as nervous as a cat to-day."

HESTER: "Naughty, naughty bad doggie to bite muvver's diamond ring."

KITTY: "Leave it to you to land a pear-shaped diamond on your hooks."

HESTER: "He fell for it, just like that!"

KITTY: "You could milk a billiard ball."

HESTER: "I don't see any 'quality of mercy' to spare around your flat."

There were the two years of high school, you see.

"Ed's going out to Geyser Springs next month for the cure. I told him he could not go without me unless over my dead body, he could not."

"Geyser Springs. That's thirty miles from my home town."

"Your home town? Nighty-night! I thought you was born on the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway with a lobster claw in your mouth."

"Demopolis, Ohio."

"What is that--a skin disease?"

"My last relation in the world died out there two years ago. An aunt. Wouldn't mind some Geyser Springs myself if I could get some of this stiffness out of my joints."

"Come on! I dare you! May Denison and Chris will come in on it, and Babe can always find somebody. Make it three or four cars full and let's motor out. We all need a good boiling, anyways. Wheeler looks about ready for spontaneous combustion, and I got a twinge in my left little toe. You on?"

"I am, if he is."

"If he is!" He'd fall for life in an Igorrote village with a ring in his nose if you wanted it."

And truly enough, it did come about that on a height-of-the-season evening a highly cosmopolitan party of four couples trooped into the solid-marble foyer of the Geyser Springs Hotel, motor coated, goggled, veiled; a whole litter of pigskin and patent-leather bags, hampers, and hat boxes, two golf bags, two Pomeranians, a bull in spiked collar, furs, leather coats, monogrammed rugs, thermos bottles, air pillows, robes, and an _ensemble_ of fourteen wardrobe trunks sent by express.

They took the "cure." Rode horseback, motored, played roulette at the casino for big stakes, and scorned the American plan of service for the smarter European idea, with a special _à la carte_ menu for each meal. Extraordinary-looking mixed drinks, strictly against the mandates of the "cure," appeared at their table. Strange midnight goings-on were reported by the more conservative hotel guests, and the privacy of their circle was allowed full integrity by the little veranda groups of gouty ladies or middle-aged husbands with liver spots on their faces. The bath attendants reveled in the largest tips of the season. When Hester walked down the large dining room evenings, she was a signal for the craning of necks for the newest shock of her newest extreme toilette. The kinds of toilettes that shocked the women into envy and mental notes of how the underarm was cut, and the men into covert delight. Wheeler liked to sit back and put her through her paces like a high-strung filly.

"Make 'em sit up, girl! You got them all looking like dimes around here."

One night she descended to the dining room in a black evening gown so daringly lacking in back, and yet, withal, so slimly perfect an elegant thing, that an actual breathlessness hung over the hall, the clatter of dishes pausing.

There was a gold bird of paradise dipped down her hair over one shoulder, trailing its smoothness like fingers of lace. She defied with it as she walked.

"Take it from me," said Kitty, who felt fat in lavender that night, "she's going it one too strong."

Another evening she descended, always last, in a cloth of silver with a tiny, an absurd, an impeccably tight silver turban dipped down over one eye, and absolutely devoid of jewels except the pear-shaped diamond on her left forefinger.

They were a noisy, a spending, a cosmopolitan crowd of too-well-fed men and too-well-groomed women, ignored by the veranda groups of wives and mothers, openly dazzling and arousing a tremendous curiosity in the

younger set, and quite obviously sought after by their own kind.

But Hester's world, too, is all run through with sharply defined social schisms.

"I wish that Irwin woman wouldn't always hang round our crowd," she said, one morning, as she and Kitty lay side by side in the cooling room after their baths, massages, manicures, and shampoos. "I don't want to be seen running with her."

"Did you see the square emerald she wore last night?"

"Fake. I know the clerk at the Synthetic Jewelry Company had it made up for her. She's cheap, I tell you. Promiscuous. Who ever heard of anybody standing back of her? She knocks around. She sells her old clothes to Tessie, my manicurist. I've got a line on her. She's cheap."

Kitty, who lay with her face under a white mud of cold cream and her little mouth merely a hole, turned on her elbow.

"We can't all be top-notchers, Hester," she said. "You're hard as nails."

"I guess I am, but you've got to be to play this game. The ones who aren't end up by stuffing the keyhole and turning on the gas. You've got to play it hard or not at all. If you've got the name, you might as well have the game."

"If I had it to do over again--well, there would be one more wife-and-mother role being played in this little old world, even if I had to play it on a South Dakota farm."

"'Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well,' I used to write in a copy book. Well, that's the way I feel about this. To me, anything is worth doing to escape the cotton stockings and lisle next to your skin. I admit I never sit down and think. You know, sit down and take stock of myself. What's the use thinking? Live! Yes," mused Hester, her arms in a wreath over her head, "I think I'd do it all over again. There's not been so many, at that. Three. The first was a salesman. He'd have married me, but I couldn't see it on six thousand a year. Nice fellow, too--an easy spender in a small way, but I couldn't see a future to ladies' neckwear. I hear he made good later in munitions. Al was a pretty good sort, too, but tight. How I hate tightness! I've been pretty lucky in the long run, I guess."

"Did I say 'hard as nails'?" said Kitty, grotesquely fitting a cigarette in the aperture of her mouth. "I apologize. Why, alongside of you a piece of flint is morning cereal. Haven't you ever had a love affair? I've been married twice--that's how chicken hearted I can be. Haven't

you ever pumped a little faster just because a certain some one walked into the room?"

"Once."

"Once what?"

"I liked a fellow. Pretty much. A blond. Say, he was blond! I always think to myself, Kit, next to Gerald, you've got the bluest eyes under heaven. Only, his didn't have any dregs."

"Thanks, dearie."

"I sometimes wonder about Gerald. I ought to drive over while we're out here. Poor old Gerald Fishback!"

"Sweet name--'Fishback.' No wonder you went wrong, dearie."

"Oh, I'm not getting soft. I saw my bed and made it, nice and soft and comfy, and I'm lying on it without a whimper."

"You just bet your life you made it up nice and comfy! You've the right idea; I have to hand that to you. You command respect from them. Lord! Ed would as soon fire a teacup at me as not. But, with me, it pays. The last one he broke he made up to me with my opal-and-diamond beetle."

"Wouldn't wear an opal if it was set next to the Hope diamond."

"Superstitious, dearie?"

"Unlucky. Never knew it to fail."

"Not a superstition in my bones. I don't believe in walking under ladders or opening an umbrella in the house or sitting down with thirteen, but, Lordy! never saw the like with you! Thought you'd have the hysterics over that little old vanity mirror you broke that day out at the races."

"Br-r-r! I hated it."

"Lay easy, dearie. Nothing can touch you the way he's raking in the war contracts."

"Great--isn't it?"

"Play for a country home, dearie. I always say real estate and jewelry are something in the hand. Look ahead in this game, I always say."

"You just bet I've looked ahead."

"So have I, but not enough."

"Somehow, I never feel afraid. I could get a job to-morrow if I had to."

"Say, dearie, if it comes to that, with twenty pounds off me, there's not a chorus I couldn't land back in."

"I worked once, you know, in Lichtig's import shop."

"Fifth Avenue?"

"Yes. It was in between the salesman and Al. I sold two thousand five hundred dollars' worth of gowns the first week."

"Sure enough?"

"'Girl,' old man Lichtig said to me the day I quit--'girl,' he said, 'if ever you need this job again, comeback; it's waiting.'"

"Fine chance!"

"I've got the last twenty-five dollars I earned pinned away this minute in the pocket of the little dark-blue suit I wore to work. I paid for that suit with my first month's savings. A little dark-blue Norfolk, Lichtig let me have out of stock for twenty-seven fifty."

"Were they giving them away with a pound of tea?"

"Honest, Kitty, it was neat. Little white shirt waist, tan shoes, and one of those slick little five-dollar sailors, and every cent paid out of my salary. I could step into that outfit to-morrow, look the part, and land back that job or any other. I had a way with the trade, even back at Finley's."

"Here, hold my jewel bag, honey; I'm going to die of cold-cream suffocation if she don't soon come back and unsmeared me."

"Opal beetle in it?"

"Yes, dearie; but it won't bite. It's muzzled with my diamond horseshoe."

"Nothing doing, Kit. Put it under your pillow."

"You better watch out. There's a thirteenth letter in the alphabet; you might accidentally use it some day. You're going to have a sweet time to-night, you are!"

"Why?"

"The boys have engaged De Butera to come up to the rooms."

"You mean the fortune teller over at the Stag Hotel?"

"She's not a fortune teller, you poor nervous wreck. She's the highest-priced spiritualist in the world. Moving tables--spooks--woof!"

"Faugh!" said Hester, rising from her couch and feeling with her little bare feet for the daintiest of pink-silk mules. "I could make tables move, too, at forty dollars an hour. Where's my attendant? I want an alcohol rub."

They did hold séance that night in a fine spirit of lark, huddled together in the de-luxe sitting room of one of their suites, and little half-hysterical shrieks and much promiscuous ribaldry under cover of darkness.

Madame de Butera was of a distinctly fat and earthy blondness, with a coarse-lace waist over pink, and short hands covered with turquoise rings of many shapes and blues.

Tables moved. A dead sister of Wheeler's spoke in thin, high voice. Why is it the dead are always so vocally thin and high?

A chair tilted itself on hind legs, eliciting squeals from the women. Babe spoke with a gentleman friend long since passed on, and Kitty with a deceased husband, and began to cry quite sobbily and took little sips of highball quite gulpily. May Denison, who was openly defiant, allowed herself to be hypnotized and lay rigid between two chairs, and Kitty went off into rampant hysteria until Wheeler finally placed a hundred-dollar bill over the closed eyes, and whether under it, or to the legerdemain of madam's manipulating hands, the tight eyes opened, May, amid riots of laughter, claiming for herself the hundred-dollar bill, and Kitty, quite resuscitated, jumping up for a table cancan, her yellow hair tumbling, and her china-blue eyes with the dregs in them inclined to water.

All but Hester. She sat off by herself in a peacock-colored gown that wrapped her body suavely as if the fabric were soaking wet, a band of smoky-blue about her forehead. Never intoxicated, a slight amount of alcohol had a tendency to make her morose.

"What's the matter, Cleo?" asked Wheeler, sitting down beside her and lifting her cool fingers one by one, and, by reason of some remote analogy that must have stirred within him, seeing in her a Nile queen. "What's the matter Cleo? Does the spook stuff get your goat?"

She turned on him eyes that were all troubled up, like waters suddenly wind-blown.

"God!" she said, her fingers, nails inward, closing about his arm.
"Wheeler--can--can the--dead--speak?"

But fleeting as the hours themselves were the moods of them all, and the following morning there they were, the eight of them, light with laughter and caparisoned again as to hampers, veils, coats, dogs, off for a day's motoring through the springtime countryside.

"Where to?" shouted Wheeler, twisting from where he and Hester sat in the first of the cars to call to the two motor-loads behind.

"I thought Crystal Cave was the spot"--from May Denison in the last of the cars, winding her head in a scarlet veil.

"Crystal Cave it is, then."

"Is that through Demopolis?"

Followed a scanning of maps.

"Sure! Here it is! See! Granite City. Mitchell. Demopolis. Crystal Cave."

"Good Lord! Hester, you're not going to spend any time in that dump?"

"It's my home town," she replied, coldly. "The only relation I had is buried there. It's nothing out of your way to drop me on the court-house steps and pick me up as you drive back, I've been wanting to get there ever since we're down here. Wanting to stop by your home town you haven't seen in five years isn't unreasonable, is it?"

He admitted it wasn't, leaning to kiss her.

She turned to him a face soft, with one of the pouts he usually found irresistible.

"Honey," she said, "what do you think?"

"What?"

"Chris is buying May that chinchilla coat I showed you in Meyerbloom's window the day before we left."

"The deuce he is!" he said, letting go of her hand, but hers immediately covering his.

"She's wiring her sister in the 'Girlie Revue' to go in and buy it for her."

"Outrage--fifteen thousand dollars to cover a woman's back! Look at the beautiful scenery, honey! You're always prating about views. Look at those hills over there! Great--isn't it?"

"I wouldn't expect it, Wheeler, if it wasn't war year and you landing one big contract after another. I'd hate to see May show herself in that chinchilla coat when we could beat her to it by a wire. I could telegraph Meyerbloom himself. I bought the sable rug of him. I'd hate it, Wheeler, to see her and Chris beat us to it. So would you. What's fifteen thousand when one of your contracts alone runs into the hundred thousands? Honey?"

"Wire," he said, sourly, but not withdrawing his hand from hers.

* * * * *

They left her at the shady court-house steps in Demopolis, but with pleasantries and gibe.

"Give my love to the town pump."

"Rush the old oaken growler for me."

"So long!" she called, eager to be rid of them. "Pick me up at six sharp."

She walked slowly up High Street. Passers-by turned to stare, but otherwise she was unrecognized. There was a new five-and-ten-cent store, and Finley Brothers had added an ell. High Street was paved. She made a foray down into the little side street where she had spent those queerly remote first seventeen years of her life. How dim her aunt seemed! The little unpainted frame house was gone. There was a lumber yard on the site. Everything seemed to have shrunk. The street was narrower and dirtier than she recalled it.

She made one stop, at the house of Maggie Simms, a high-school chum. It was a frame house, too, and she remembered that the front door opened directly into the parlor and the side entrance was popularly used instead. But a strange sister-in-law opened the side door. Maggie was married and living in Cincinnati. Oh, fine--a master mechanic, and there were twins. She started back toward Finley's, thinking of Gerald, and halfway she changed her mind.

Maggie Simms married and living in Cincinnati. Twins! Heigh-ho! What a world! The visit was hardly a success. At half after five she was on her way back to the court-house steps. Stupid to have made it six!

And then, of course, and quite as you would have it, Gerald Fishback came along. She recognized his blondness long before he saw her. He was bigger and more tanned, and, as of old, carried his hat in his hand. She noticed that there were no creases down the front of his trousers, but the tweed was good and he gave off that intangible aroma of well-being.

She was surprised at the old thrill racing over her. Seeing him was like a stab of quick steel through the very pit of her being. She reached out, touching him, before he saw her.

"Gerald," she said, soft and teasingly.

It was actually as if he had been waiting for that touch, because before he could possibly have perceived her her name was on his lips.

"Hester!" he said, the blueness of his eyes flashing between blinks.

"Not Hester?"

"Yes, Hester," she said, smiling up at him.

He grasped both her hands, stammering for words that wanted to come quicker than he could articulate.

"Hester!" he kept repeating. "Hester!"

"To think you knew me, Gerald!"

"Know you! I'd know you blindfolded. And how--I--You're beautiful, Hester! I think you've grown five years younger."

"You've got on, Gerald. You look it."

"Yes; I'm general manager now at Finley's."

"I'm so glad. Married?"

"Not while there's a Hester Bevins on earth."

She started at her own name.

"How do you know I'm not married?"

"I--I know--" he said, reddening up.

"Isn't there some place we can talk, Gerald? I've thirty minutes before my friends call for me."

"Thirty minutes?"

"Your rooms? Haven't you rooms or a room where we could go and sit down?"

"Why--why, no, Hester," he said, still red. "I'd rather you didn't go there. But here. Let's stop in at the St. James Hotel. There's a parlor."

To her surprise, she felt herself color up and was pleasantly conscious of her finger tips.

"You darling!" She smiled up at him.

They were seated presently in the unadorned plush-and-cherry, Nottingham-and-Axminster parlor of a small-town hotel.

"Hester," he said, "you're like a vision come to earth."

"I'm a bad girl," she said, challenging his eyes for what he knew.

"You're a little saint walked down and leaving an empty pedestal in my dreams."

She placed her forefinger over his mouth.

"Sh-h!" she said. "I'm not a saint, Gerald; you know that."

"Yes," he said, with a great deal of boyishness in his defiance, "I do know it, Hester, but it is those who have been through the fire who can sometimes come out--new. It was your early environment."

"My aunt died on the town, Gerald, I heard. I could have saved her all that if I had only known. She was cheap, aunt was. Poor soul! She never looked ahead."

"It was your early environment, Hester. I've explained that often enough to them here. I'd bank on you, Hester--swear by you."

She patted him.

"I'm a pretty bad egg, Gerald. According to the standards of a town like this, I'm rotten, and they're about right. For five years, Gerald, I've--"

"The real you is ahead of--and not behind you, Hester."

"How wonderful," she said, "for you to feel that way, but--"

"Hester," he said, more and more the big boy, and his big blond head

nearing hers, "I don't care about anything that's past; I only know that, for me, you are the--"

"Gerald," she said, "for God's sake!"

"I'm a two hundred-a-month man now, Hester. I want to build you the prettiest, the whitest little house in this town. Out in the Briarwood section. I'll make them kowtow to you, Hester; I--"

"Why," she said, slowly, and looking at him with a certain sadness, "you couldn't keep me in stockings, Gerald! The aigrettes on this hat cost more than one month of your salary."

"Good God!" he said.

"You're a dear, sweet boy just the same; but you remember what I told you about my crêpe-de-Chine soul."

"Just the same, I love you best in those crispy white shirt waists you used to wear and the little blue suits and sailor hats. You remember that day at Finleys' picnic, Hester, that day, dear, that you--you--"

"You dear boy!"

"But it--your mistake--it--it's all over. You work now, don't you, Hester?"

Somehow, looking into the blueness of his eyes and their entreaty for her affirmative, she did what you or I might have done. She half lied, regretting it while the words still smoked on her lips.

"Why, yes, Gerald; I've held a fine position in Lichtig Brothers, New York importers. Those places sometimes pay as high as seventy-five a week. But I don't make any bones, Gerald; I've not been an angel."

"The--the salesman, Hester?"--his lips quivering with a nausea for the question.

"I haven't seen him in four years," she answered, truthfully.

He laid his cheek on her hand.

"I knew you'd come through. It was your environment. I'll marry you to-morrow--to-day, Hester. I love you."

"You darling boy!" she said, her lips back tight against her teeth. "You darling, darling boy!"

"Please, Hester! We'll forget what has been."

"Let me go," she said, rising and pinning on her hat; "let me go--or--or I'll cry, and--and I don't want to cry."

"Hester," he called, rushing after her and wanting to fold her back into his arms, "let me prove my trust--my love--"

"Don't! Let me go! Let me go!"

At slightly after six the ultra cavalcade drew up at the court-house steps. She was greeted with the pleasantries and the gibes.

"Have a good time, sweetness?" asked Wheeler, arranging her rugs.

"Yes," she said, lying back and letting her lids droop; "but tired--very, very tired."

At the hotel, she stopped a moment to write a telegram before going up for the vapor bath, nap, and massage that were to precede dinner.

"Meyerbloom & Co., Furriers. Fifth Avenue, New York," it was addressed.

* * * * *

This is not a war story except that it has to do with profiteering, parlor patriots, and the return of Gerald Fishback.

While Hester was living this tale, and the chinchilla coat was enveloping her like an ineffably tender caress, three hundred thousand of her country's youths were at strangle hold across three thousand miles of sea, and on a notorious night when Hester walked, fully dressed in a green gown of iridescent fish scales, into the electric fountain of a seaside cabaret, and Wheeler had to carry her to her car wrapped in a sable rug, Gerald Fishback was lying with his face in Flanders mud, and his eye sockets blackly deep and full of shrapnel, and a lung-eating gas cloud rolling at him across the vast bombarded dawn.

* * * * *

Hester read of him one morning, sitting up in bed against a mound of lace-over-pink pillows, a masseuse at the pink soles of her feet. It was as if his name catapulted at her from a column she never troubled to read. She remained quite still, looking at the name for a full five minutes after it had pierced her full consciousness. Then, suddenly, she swung out of bed, tilting over the masseuse.

"Tessie," she said, evenly enough, "that will do. I have to hurry to Long Island to a base hospital. Go to that little telephone in the hall--will you?--and call my car."

But the visit was not so easy of execution. It required two days of red tape and official dispensation before she finally reached the seaside hospital that, by unpleasant coincidence, only a year before had been the resort hotel of more than one dancing orgy.

She thought she would faint when she saw him, jerking herself back with a straining of all her faculties. The blood seemed to drain away from her body, leaving her ready to sink, and only the watchful and threatening eye of a man nurse sustained her. He was sitting up in bed, and she would never have recognized in him anything of Gerald except for the shining Scandinavian quality of his hair. His eyes were not bandaged, but their sockets were dry and bare like the beds of old lakes long since drained. She had only seen the like in eyeless marble busts. There were unsuspected cheek bones, pitched now very high in his face, and his neck, rising above the army nightshirt, seemed cruelly long, possibly from thinness.

"Are you Hester?" whispered the man nurse.

She nodded, her tonsils squeezed together in an absolute knot.

"He called for you all through his delirium," he said, and went out. She stood at the bedside, trying to keep down the screams from her speech when it should come. But he was too quick for her.

"Hester," he said, feeling out.

And in their embrace, her agony melted to tears that choked and seared, beat and scalded her, and all the time it was he who held her with rigid arm, whispered to her, soothed down the sobs which tore through her like the rip of silk, seeming to split her being.

"Now--now! Why, Hester! Now--now--now! Sh-h! It will be over in a minute. You mustn't feel badly. Come now, is this the way to greet a fellow that's so darn glad to see you that nothing matters? Why I can see you, Hester. Plain as day in your little crispy waist. Now, now! You'll get used to it in a minute. Now--now--"

"I can't stand it, Gerald! I can't! Can't! Kill me, Gerald, but don't ask me to stand it!"

He stroked down the side of her, lingering at her cheek.

"Sh-h! Take your time, dear," he said, with the first furry note in his voice. "I know it's hard, but take your time. You'll get used to me. It's the shock, that's all. Sh-h!"

She covered his neck with kisses and scalding tears, her compassion for

him racing through her in chills.

"I could tear out my eyes, Gerald, and give them to you. I could tear out my heart and give it to you. I'm bursting of pain. Gerald! Gerald!"

There was no sense of proportion left her. She could think only of what her own physical suffering might do in penance. She would willingly have opened the arteries of her heart and bled for him on the moment. Her compassion wanted to scream. She, who had never sacrificed anything, wanted suddenly to bleed at his feet, and prayed to do so on the agonized crest of the moment.

"There's a girl! Why, I'm going to get well, Hester, and do what thousands of others of the blinded are doing. Build up a new, a useful, and a busy life."

"It's not fair! It's not fair!"

"I'm ready now, except for this old left lung. It's burnt a bit, you see--gas."

"God! God!"

"It's pretty bad, I admit. But there's another way of looking at it. There's a glory in being chosen to bear your country's wounds."

"Your beautiful eyes! Your blue, beautiful eyes! O God, what does it all mean? Living! Dying! All the rotters, all the rat-eyed ones I know, scot-free and Gerald chosen. God! God! where are you?"

"He was never so close to me as now, Hester. And with you here, dear, He is closer than ever."

"I'll never leave you, Gerald," she said, crying down into his sleeve again. "Don't be afraid of the dark, dear; I'll never leave you."

"Nonsense!" he said, smoothing her hair that the hat had fallen away from.

"Never! Never! I wish I were a mat for you to walk on. I want to crawl on my hands and knees for you. I'll never leave you, Gerald--never!"

"My beautiful Hester!" he said, unsteadily, and then again, "Nonsense!"

But, almost on the moment, the man nurse returned and she was obliged to leave him, but not without throbbing promises of the to-morrow's return, and then there took place, downstairs in an anteroom, a long, a closeted, and very private interview with a surgeon and more red tape and filing of applications. She was so weak from crying that a nurse was

called finally to help her through the corridors to her car.

Gerald's left lung was burned out and he had three, possibly four, weeks to live.

All the way home, in her tan limousine with the little yellow curtains, she sat quite upright, away from the upholstery, crying down her uncovered face, but a sudden, an exultant determination hardening in her mind.

* * * * *

That night a strange conversation took place in the Riverside Drive apartment. She sat on Wheeler's left knee, toying with his platinum chain, a strained, a rather terrible pallor out in her face, but the sobs well under her voice, and its modulation about normal. She had been talking for over two hours, silencing his every interruption until he had fallen quite still.

"And--and that's all, Wheeler," she ended up. "I've told you everything. We were never more than just--friends--Gerald and me. You must take my word for it, because I swear it before God."

"I take your word, Hester," he said, huskily.

"And there he lies, Wheeler, without--without any eyes in his head. Just as if they'd been burned out by irons. And he--he smiles when he talks. That's the awful part. Smiles like--well, I guess like the angel he--he almost is. You see, he says it's a glory to carry the wounds of his country. Just think! just think! that boy to feel that, the way he lies there!"

"Poor boy! Poor, poor boy!"

"Gerald's like that. So--so full of faith. And, Wheeler, he thinks he's going to get well and lead a useful life like they teach the blind to do. He reminds me of one of those Greek statues down at the Athens Café. You know--broken. That's it; he's a broken statue."

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! Do something for him. Buy the finest fruit in the town for him. Send a case of wine. Two."

"I--I think I must be torn to pieces inside, Wheeler, the way I've cried."

"Poor little girl!"

"Wheeler?"

"Now, now," he said; "taking it so to heart won't do no good. It's rotten, I know, but worrying won't help. Got me right upset, too. Come, get it off your mind. Let's take a ride. Doll up; you look a bit peaked. Come now, and to-morrow we'll buy out the town for him."

"Wheeler?" she said. "Wheeler?"

"What?"

"Don't look, Wheeler. I've something else to ask of you--something queer."

"Now, now," he said, his voice hardening but trying to maintain a chiding note; "you know what you promised after the chinchilla--no more this year until--"

"No, no; for God's sake, not that! It's still about Gerald."

"Well?"

"Wheeler, he's only got four weeks to live. Five at the outside."

"Now, now, girl; we've been all over that."

"He loves me, Wheeler, Gerald does."

"Yes?" dryly.

"It would be like doing something decent--the only decent thing I've done in all my life, Wheeler, almost like doing something for the war, the way these women in the pretty white caps have done, and you know we--we haven't turned a finger for it except to--to gain--if I was to--to marry Gerald for those few weeks, Wheeler. I know it's a--rotten sacrifice, but I guess that's the only kind I'm capable of making."

He sat squat, with his knees spread.

"You crazy?" he said.

"It would mean, Wheeler, his dying happy. He doesn't know it's all up with him. He'd be made happy for the poor little rest of his life. He loves me. You see, Wheeler, I was his first--his only sweetheart. I'm on a pedestal, he says, in his dreams. I never told you--but that boy was willing to marry me, Wheeler, knowing--some--of the things I am. He's always carried round a dream of me, you see--no, you wouldn't see, but I've been--well, I guess sort of a medallion that won't tarnish in his heart. Wheeler, for the boy's few weeks he has left? Wheeler?"

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"I'm not turning holy, Wheeler. I am what I am. But that boy lying out there--I can't bear it! It wouldn't make any difference with us--afterward. You know where you stand with me and for always, but it would mean the dying happy of a boy who fought for us. Let me marry that boy, Wheeler. Let his light go out in happiness. Wheeler? Please, Wheeler?" He would not meet her eyes. "Wheeler?"

"Go to it, Hester," he said, coughing about in his throat and rising to walk away. "Bring him here and give him the fat of the land. You can count on me to keep out of the way. Go to it," he repeated.

And so they were married, Hester holding his hand beside the hospital cot, the man nurse and doctor standing by, and the chaplain incanting the immemorial words. A bar of sunshine lay across the bed, and Gerald pronounced each "I will" in a lifted voice that carried to the four corners of the little room. She was allowed to stay that night past hospital hours, and they talked with the dusk flowing over them.

"Hester, Hester," he said, "I should have had the strength to hold out against your making this terrible sacrifice."

"It's the happiest hour of my life," she said, kissing him.

"I feel well enough to get up now, sweetheart."

"Gerald, don't force. You've weeks ahead before you are ready for that."

"But to-morrow, dear, home! In whose car are you calling for me to-morrow to take me _home_?"

"In a friend's, dearest."

"Won't I be crowding up our little apartment? Describe it again to me, dearest--our _home_."

"It's so little, Gerald. Three rooms and the littlest, babies kitchen. When you're once up, I'll teach its every corner to you."

Tears seeped through the line where his lids had been, and it was almost more than she could bear.

"I'll make it up to you, though, Hester. I know I should have been strong enough to hold out against your marrying me, but I'll make it up. I've a great scheme; a sort of braille system of accountancy--"

"Please, Gerald--not now!"

"If only, Hester, I felt easier about the finances. Will your savings

stand the strain? Your staying at home from your work this way--and then me--"

"Gerald dear, I've told you so often--I've saved more than we need."

"My girl!"

"My dear, my dear!" she said.

* * * * *

They moved him with hardly a jar in an army ambulance, and with the yellow limousine riding alongside to be of possible aid, and she had the bed stripped of its laces and cool with linen for him, and he sighed out when they placed him on it and would not let go her hand.

"What a feeling of space for so little a room!"

"It's the open windows, love."

He lay back tiredly.

"What sweet linen!"

"I shopped it for you."

"You, too--you're in linen, Hester?"

"A percale shirt waist. I shopped it for you, too."

"Give me your hand," he said, and pressed a string of close kisses into its palm.

The simplicity of the outrageous subterfuge amazed even her. She held hothouse grapes at two dollars a pound to his lips, and he ate them through a smile.

"Naughty, extravagant girl!" he said.

"I saw them on a fruit stand for thirty cents, and couldn't resist."

"Never mind; I'll make it up to you."

Later, he asked for braille books, turning his sightless face toward her as he studied, trying to concentrate through the pain in his lung.

"If only you wouldn't insist upon the books awhile yet, dear. The doctor says it's too soon."

"I feel so strong, Hester, with you near, and, besides, I must start the pot boiling."

She kissed down into the high nap of his hair, softly.

Evenings, she read to him newspaper accounts of his fellow-soldiers, and the day of the peace, for which he had paid so terribly, she rolled his bed, alone, with a great tugging and straining, to the open window, where the wind from the river could blow in against him and steamboat whistles shoot up like rockets.

She was so inexpressibly glad for the peace day. Somehow, it seemed easier and less blackly futile to give him up.

Of Wheeler for three running weeks she had not a glimpse, and then, one day, he sent up a hamper, not a box, but an actual trunk of roses, and she, in turn, sent them up the back way to Kitty's flat, not wanting even their fragrance released.

With Kitty there were little hurried confabs each day outside the apartment door in the hallway before the elevator shaft. A veil of awe seemed to wrap the Drew woman.

"I can't get it out of my head, Hester. It's like a fairy story, and, in another way, it's a scream--Wheeler standing for this."

"Sh-h, Kitty! His ears are so sensitive."

"Quit shushing me every time I open my mouth. Poor kid! Let me have a look at him. He wouldn't know."

"No! No!"

"God! if it wasn't so sad it would be a scream--Wheeler footing the bills!"

"Oh--you! Oh--oh--you!"

"All right, all right! Don't take the measles over it. I'm going. Here's some chicken broth I brought down. Ed sent it up to me from Sherry's."

But Hester poured it into the sink for some nameless reason, and brewed some fresh from a fowl she tipped the hallboy a dollar to go out and purchase.

She slept on a cot at the foot of his bed, so sensitive to his waking that almost before he came up to consciousness she was at his side. All day she wore the little white shirt waists, a starched one fresh each morning, and at night scratchy little unlacy nightgowns with long

sleeves and high yokes. He liked to run his hand along the crispness of the fabric.

"I love you in cool stuff, Hester. You're so cool yourself, I always think of you in the little white waist and blue skirt. You remember, dear--Finleys' annual?"

"I--I'm going to dress like that for you always, Gerald."

"I won't let you be going back to work for long, sweetheart. I've some plans up my sleeve, I have."

"Yes! Yes!"

But when the end did come, it was with as much of a shock as if she had not been for days expecting it. The doctor had just left, puncturing his arm and squirting into his poor tired system a panacea for the pain. But he would not react to it, fighting down the drowsiness.

"Hester," he said, suddenly, and a little weakly, "lean down, sweetheart, and kiss me--long--long--"

She did, and it was with the pressure of her lips to his that he died.

* * * * *

It was about a week after the funeral that Wheeler came back. She was on the _chaise-longue_ that had been dragged out into the parlor, in the webbiest of white negligées, a little large-eyed, a little subdued, but sweetening the smile she turned toward him by a trick she had of lifting the brows.

"Hel-lo, Wheeler!" she said, raising her cheek to be kissed.

He trailed his lips, but did not seek her mouth, sitting down rather awkwardly and in the spread-kneed fashion he had.

"Well, girl--you all right?"

"You helped," she said.

"It gave me a jolt, too. I made over twenty-five thousand to the Red Cross on the strength of it."

"Thank you, Wheeler."

"Lord!" he said, rising and rubbing his hands together. "Give us a couple of fingers to drink, honey; I'm cotton-mouthed."

She reached languidly for a blue-enameled bell, lying back, with her arms dangling and her smile out. Then, as if realizing that the occasion must be lifted, turned her face to him.

"Old bummer!" she said, using one of her terms of endearment for him and two-thirds closing her eyes. Then did he stoop and kiss her roundly on the lips.

* * * *

For the remainder of this tale, I could wish for a pen supernally dipped, or for a metaphysician's plating to my vernacular, or for the linguistic patois of that land off somewhere to the west of Life. Or maybe just a neurologist's chart of Hester's nerve history would help.

In any event, after an evening of musical comedy and of gelatinous dancing, Hester awoke at four o'clock the next morning out of an hour of sound sleep, leaping to her knees there in bed like a quick flame, her gesture shooting straight up toward the jointure of wall and ceiling.

"Gerald!" she called, her smoky black hair floating around her and her arms cutting through the room's blackness. "Gerald!" Suddenly the room was not black. It was light with the Scandinavian blondness of Gerald, the head of him nebulous there above the pink-satin canopy of her dressing table, and, more than that, the drained lakes of his sockets were deep with eyes. Yes, in all their amazing blueness, but queerly sharpened to steel points that went through Hester and through her as if bayonets were pushing into her breasts and her breathing.

"Gerald!" she shrieked, in one more cry that curdled the quiet, and sat up in bed, trembling and hugging herself, and breathing in until her lips were drawn shudderingly against her teeth like wind-sucked window shades.

"Gerald!" And then the picture did a sort of moving-picture fade-out, and black Lottie came running with her hair grotesquely greased and flattened to take out the kink, and gave her a drink of water with the addition of two drops from a bottle, and turned on the night light and went back to bed.

The next morning Hester carried about what she called "a head," and, since it was Wheeler's day at Rosencranz, remained in bed until three o'clock, Kitty curled at the foot of it the greater part of the forenoon.

"It was the rotten night did me up. Dreams! Ugh! dreams!"

"No wonder," diagnosed Kitty, sweetly. "Indigestion from having your cake and eating it."

At three she dressed and called for her car, driving down to the Ivy Funeral Rooms, a Gothic Thanatopsis, set, with one of those laughs up her sleeves in which the vertical city so loves to indulge, right in the heart of the town, between an automobile-accessory shop and a quick-lunch room. Gerald had been buried from there with simple flag-draped service in the Gothic chapel that was protected from the view and roar of the Elevated trains by suitably stained windows. There was a check in Hester's purse made out for an amount that corresponded to the statement she had received from the Ivy Funeral Rooms. And right here again, for the sake of your elucidation, I could wish at least for the neurologist's chart. At the very door to the establishment--with one foot across the threshold, in fact--she paused, her face tilted toward the corner where wall and ceiling met, and at whatever she saw there her eyes dilated widely and her left hand sprang to her bosom as if against the incision of quick steel. Then, without even entering, she rushed back to her car again, urging her chauffeur, at the risk of every speed regulation, homeward.

That was the beginning of purgatorial weeks that were soon to tell on Hester. They actually brought out a streak of gray through her hair, which Lottie promptly dyed and worked under into the lower part of her coiffure. For herself, Hester would have let it remain.

Wheeler was frankly perplexed. God knows it was bad enough to be called upon to endure streaks of unreasonableness at Rosencranz, but Hester wasn't there to show that side to him if she had it. To be pretty frank about it, she was well paid not to. Well paid! He'd done his part. More than nine out of ten would have done. Been made a jay of, if the truth was known. She was a Christmas-tree bauble and was expected to throw off holiday iridescence. There were limits!

"You're off your feed, girl. Go off by yourself and speed up."

"It's the nights, Gerald. Good God--I mean Wheeler! They kill me. I can't sleep. Can't you get a doctor who will give me stronger drops? He doesn't know my case. Nerves, he calls it. It's this head. If only I could get rid of this head!"

"You women and your nerves and your heads! Are you all alike? Get out and get some exercise. Keep down your gasoline bills and it will send your spirits up. There's such a thing as having it too good."

She tried to meet him in lighter vein after that, dressing her most bizarrely, and greeting him one night in a batik gown, a new process of dyeing that could be flamboyant and narrative in design. This one, a long, sinuous robe that enveloped her slimness like a flame, beginning down around the train in a sullen smoke and rushing up to her face in a burst of crimson.

He thought her so exquisitely rare that he was not above the poor, soggy device of drinking his dinner wine from the cup of her small crimson slipper, and she dangled on his knee like the dangerous little flame she none too subtly purported to be, and he spanked her quickly and softly across the wrists because she was too nervous to hold the match steadily enough for his cigar to take light, and then kissed away all the mock sting.

But the next morning, at the fateful four o'clock, and in spite of four sleeping-drops, Lottie on the cot at the foot of her bed, and the night light burning, she awoke on the crest of such a shriek that a stiletto might have slit the silence, the end of the sheet crammed up and into her mouth, and, ignoring all of Lottie's calming, sat up on her knees, her streaming eyes on the jointure of wall and ceiling, where the open, accusing ones of Gerald looked down at her. It was not that they were terrible eyes. They were full of the sweet blue, and clear as lakes. It was only that they knew. Those eyes _knew. They knew!_ She tried the device there at four o'clock in the morning of tearing up the still unpaid check to the Ivy Funeral Rooms, and then she curled up in bed with her hand in the negro maid's and her face half buried in the pillow.

"Help me, Lottie!" she begged; "help me!"

"Law! Pore child! Gettin' the horrors every night thisaway! I've been through it before with other ladies, but I never saw a case of the sober horrors befoh. Looks like they's the worst of all. Go to sleep, child. I's holdin'."

You see, Lottie had looked in on life where you and I might not. A bird's-eye view may be very, very comprehensive, but a domestic's-eye view can sometimes be very, very close.

And then, one night, after Hester had beat her hands down into the mattress and implored Gerald to close his accusing eyes, she sat up in bed, waiting for the first streak of dawn to show itself, railing at the pain in her head.

"God! My head! Rub it, Lottie! My head! My eyes! The back of my neck!"

The next morning she did what you probably have been expecting she would do. She rose and dressed, sending Lottie to bed for a needed rest. Dressed herself in the little old blue-serge suit that had been hanging in the very back of a closet for four years, with a five-and two ten-dollar bills pinned into its pocket, and pressed the little blue sailor hat down on the smooth, winglike quality of her hair. She looked smaller, peculiarly, indescribably younger. She wrote Wheeler a note, dropping it down the mail-chute in the hall, and then came back, looking

about rather aimlessly for something she might want to pack. There was nothing; so she went out quite bare and simply, with all her lovely jewels in the leather case on the upper shelf of the bedroom closet, as she had explained to Wheeler in the note.

That afternoon she presented herself to Lichtig. He was again as you would expect--round-bellied, and wore his cigar up obliquely from one corner of his mouth. He engaged her immediately at an increase of five dollars a week, and as she was leaving with the promise to report at eight-thirty the next morning he pinched her cheek, she pulling away angrily.

"None of that!"

"My mistake," he apologized.

She considered it promiscuous and cheap, and you know her aversion for cheapness.

Then she obtained, after a few forays in and out of brownstone houses in West Forty-fifth Street, one of those hall bedrooms so familiar to human-interest stories--the iron-bed, washstand, and slop-jar kind. There was a five-dollar advance required. That left her twenty dollars.

She shopped a bit then in an Eighth Avenue department store, and, with the day well on the wane, took a street car up to the Ivy Funeral Rooms. This time she entered, but the proprietor did not recognize her until she explained. As you know, she looked smaller and younger, and there was no tan car at the curb.

"I want to pay this off by the week," she said, handing him out the statement and a much-folded ten-dollar bill. He looked at her, surprised. "Yes," she said, her teeth biting off the word in a click.

"Certainly," he replied, handing her out a receipt for the ten.

"I will pay five dollars a week hereafter."

"That will stretch it out to twenty-eight weeks," he said, still doubtfully.

"I can't help it; I must."

"Certainly," he said, "that will be all right," but looked puzzled.

That night she slept in the hall bedroom in the Eighth Avenue, machine-stitched nightgown. She dropped off about midnight, praying not to awaken at four. But she did--with a slight start, sitting up in bed, her eyes where the wall and ceiling joined.

Gerald's face was there, and his blue eyes were open, but the steel points were gone. They were smiling eyes. They seemed to embrace her, to wash her in their fluid.

All her fear and the pain in her head were gone. She sat up, looking at him, the tears streaming down over her smile and her lips moving.

Then, sighing out like a child, she lay back on the pillow, turned over, and went to sleep.

* * * * *

And this is the story of Hester which so insisted to be told. I think she must have wanted you to know. And wanted Gerald to know that you know, and, in the end, I rather think she wanted God to know.

POETS

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Forerunner*, by Kahlil Gibran

Four poets were sitting around a bowl of punch that stood on a table.

Said the first poet, "Methinks I see with my third eye the fragrance of this wine hovering in space like a cloud of birds in an enchanted forest."

The second poet raised his head and said, "With my inner ear I can hear those mist-birds singing. And the melody holds my heart as the white rose imprisons the bee within her petals."

The third poet closed his eyes and stretched his arm upward, and said, "I touch them with my hand. I feel their wings, like the breath of a sleeping fairy, brushing against my fingers."

Then the fourth poet rose and lifted up the bowl, and he said, "Alas, friends! I am too dull of sight and of hearing and of touch. I cannot see the fragrance of this wine, nor hear its song, nor feel the beating of its wings. I perceive but the wine itself. Now therefore must I drink it, that it may sharpen my senses and raise me to your blissful heights."

And putting the bowl to his lips, he drank the punch to the very last drop.

The three poets, with their mouths open, looked at him aghast, and there

was a thirsty yet unlyrical hatred in their eyes.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

By Leo Kelley

*It was absolutely amazing what science could do.
The last century of progress had been wonderful!
Why even the circus was far better--or was it? _*

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"Going to the circus?" the man with the sallow complexion asked.

Kevin nodded but didn't look at his questioner. He nervously brushed back the lock of gray hair from his lined forehead and pushed his rimless glasses into a more secure position on his nose. His worried expression made him look older than his forty-eight years.

"Hear it's better than ever," the man continued in a flat toneless voice. "_The Great Golden Ball_" is supposed to be really something. Or so they say. I go every year. It's really amazing what they can do nowadays--science, I mean. Even the circus is better for it."

Is it? thought Kevin as the speeding, robot driven monorail transport rocketed past the brilliant pastel buildings shining slimly in the sunlight filtering through the plastic dome covering New New York. Oh, is it?

The man next to Kevin, discouraged by the lack of response to his attempts at conversation, quieted and both men relaxed in the privacy of their own thoughts.

At any rate, the other man did. Kevin couldn't relax. His son and daughter-in-law with whom he lived could not be aware of his absence yet, Kevin reassured himself. No one knew he was here. And when the men came for him, and Sally, perhaps with tears in her eyes, went to fetch him and his small suitcase it would be too late.

And that would be that.

The transport slowed noiselessly to a stop and most of the passengers rose to leave. The robot driver sat motionless until the last of the people, Kevin among them, stepped from the loading platform to the ground. The electronic currents whirred, the doors closed and, the circuit complete, the transport moved off into the shining caverns of the city.

The people hurried forward and passed quickly through the entrance to the amphitheater over which hung a sign:

MAIN ENTRANCE TO 2088
VERSION OF CALDWELL'S
GIANT CIRCUS

Kevin watched the people file through the entrance and slowly, almost reluctantly, followed them. He presented the red plastic coin to the robot at the entrance, but hardly heard as its electrical voice crackled, "Thank you, sir. Enjoy the show."

Kevin walked with the crowd along the spotless corridor and stepped aboard the automatic lift, getting out at the floor above. He seated himself in one of the comfortable lounging chairs and shuddered slightly as it fitted itself to the contours of his body. His fingers clutched tightly the undistinguished box he carried and something within him resisted the comfort offered by the large chair in which he sat.

People continued to file in and take places and the amphitheater was quickly filled. Soundlessly. The walls absorbed the sound and invisible filters removed the dust from the air. Occasionally people took small pills from the containers built into the sides of their chairs and popped them into their mouths. Kevin knew the pills tasted like popcorn, candy floss, and some even like hot dogs. But they were, of course, not the same as the real thing. Neither was the amphitheater.

Once there had been great canvas tents put up in the open air, and wood shavings covering the ground within, and hard benches for seats. The area around the tents had been sprinkled with small stands that sold soda in bottles and candy floss colored pink that melted into sweet nothingness in one's mouth. And everywhere there was an exciting smell made up of many separate things. Animals, the food-stuffs on sale, sawdust, and the sweat of many human beings pressed tightly together on the bleachers. There were the shouts of barkers, colored lights, and men who sold little lizards that changed color as you watched them. Kevin knew all this for he had read it in the book which he had bought from the ancient shopkeeper in the run-down section of New New York, how many years ago? Kevin smiled slightly to himself as he recalled the puzzled expression on the shop-keeper's face when he purchased the book.

The circus was beginning and Kevin interrupted his reverie to watch.

On small elevated squares in the center of the great arena stood figures almost too horrible to look at. Some flailed many arms about aimlessly; some simply stood--vacantly--and their undersize extra limbs which should have been wings fluttered sadly. One or two figures crawled about on their small squares scratching their scaly skins and making whimpering noises. One seemed to be making efforts to rise from where it lay in an amorphous heap, but was prevented from doing so by a grotesque over-sized head which the creature seemed incapable of raising from the slab on which it sprawled.

Kevin's stomach tightened. Every year, he knew, specimens such as these, the products of the effects of radiation on the genes of their parents or, perhaps, grandparents during the war that ended nearly a hundred years ago, were placed on display in the circus on their small squares where rising electrical currents instead of bars imprisoned them. Even the freak shows in the twentieth century circus were different from this. At least then the freaks were still, well, people, and freely chose to exhibit their oddities for profit. In many cases it was the only way they could earn a living. But this was different. These senseless mutants were captured like animals after having been abandoned by their parents; and were being displayed with the same lack of humanity.

Kevin watched robots perform mindless feats of strength as the circus continued. He saw colored opaque rays support a slab of concrete and gasped with the rest of the audience as the heavy slab was suddenly disintegrated by a sudden rainbow fusion of all the rays.

He listened as the recorded commercials whispered their wiles to the captive audience.

Suddenly a panel slowly opened in the ceiling of the amphitheater and dramatically, silently, an immense golden sphere descended until it hung glistening at the end of its thin cable in the center of the great arena. The lights dimmed and a hush fell over the crowd. The sphere suddenly glowed brightly and, at this signal, all other lights in the amphitheater were turned off. Kevin stared as the sphere began to rotate on its axis. He heard the first reaction the audience had yet shown; the "ohs" and "ahs" that used to accompany fireworks displays in the old days. He looked into the sphere and could not believe what he saw. He was in the sphere and he--! Everyone would know, he thought in horror and fear! He tore his eyes from the sphere and looked, expecting anything, at the people near him whose faces were dimly visible in the light from the sphere. They all gazed spellbound at the hypnotically revolving globe. Kevin listened as a woman whispered to the man next to her without taking her eyes from the shining bubble.

"Can you see it, Jim?"

"Yeah," the man answered softly.

"I always dreamed of playing a love scene with Dirk Anders. He's the best actor in the Lifies. And there I am! Doing it--in the Golden Ball," the woman sighed.

"That's not what I see," the man said in a low voice, not taking his eyes from the turning globe. Kevin watched the man's mouth working. Saw him wipe the spittle from the corners of his mouth. He turned away from the naked look in the man's eager eyes.

A child of nine or ten in front of Kevin clutched excitedly at the sleeve of the woman next to him. "I'm in there, Mom! See me! And I've got a dog! See, he's all black with one white paw! Just like I told you I wanted him to be, Mom!"

The woman answered her son absently as she stared intently into the ball and Kevin wondered what private and personal dream she saw herself living. _The Great Golden Ball_, as it turned hypnotically on its cable, was providing everyone with a vision of his or her own particular wish-fulfillment. The spellbound audience was happily wallowing in a dream world.

Kevin left his seat abruptly and boarded the lift in the corridor. On the lower floor he searched until he found the entrance to the arena. It was temporarily empty, but soon the robots would be using it as they brought equipment into the arena for the next display. Kevin opened his box and took from it the gaudy costume he had secretly made. Quickly he slipped it over his clothes. He took out a small mirror and, working quickly, covered his face with white powder. As he applied grease paint to his face in bright, bold strokes, a saucy grin smiled back at him from the mirror's surface. He slipped the white skull piece over his head and fastened the red wig to it. One last look in the mirror and he was ready.

Kevin skipped lightly, in spite of his forty-eight years, out into the glaring light of the arena.

Silence greeted him.

He walked about. He skipped. And suddenly fell. He rose, rubbing the place of his contact with the floor, and scanned the floor beneath his feet. Suddenly, he threw up his hands in mock surprise and, bending from the waist, picked up something from the floor. Triumphant he held it up. It took the audience a minute or two to "see" the imaginary straw, or pin, or whatever it was, that was clutched between Kevin's

thumb and index finger. His painted smile beamed on the people before him and seemed to grow larger as a faint titter arose from a little girl in the first tier of seats.

Kevin waved to her.

She hid her face in her hands. And then waved shyly back.

Kevin skipped about the arena watching the people whispering among themselves. The softest ripple of laughter ran through the audience and Kevin's heart soared. He repeated his fall and waved to a small boy who waved wildly back.

Kevin's wig bobbed gaily as he hopped and strutted about the arena waving to the children.

"Wave to me! Wave to me!" cried a shrill voice from the stands.

Kevin did not see the robots approaching on the run and yet was not surprised when they seized him and carried him from the arena, his red wig still bobbing gaily. It could not have ended otherwise, Kevin knew. But no matter. The children had laughed. So had many of the adults.

* * * * *

The robots deposited him in the corridor beside the entrance to the arena and Kevin found himself facing two well dressed and corpulent gentlemen.

"What's going on here?" shouted the first man. This was Mr. Caldwell himself, the owner of the circus. His picture had been on the Communico Screen in connection with the advertising for the circus Kevin remembered.

"Are you crazy?" the second man sputtered.

Kevin slowly removed the wig and the white skull piece and stood with lowered eyes, his arms at his sides, facing the two angry men. As they continued to shout at him for an explanation Kevin, using the skull piece, wiped the clown make-up from his face.

Both men, out of breath, paused and Kevin opened his mouth to speak. "I want to apolo--," he began but Caldwell interrupted him.

"Hey, Mike," he said to the other man, "Isn't this the guy whose picture they're sending out on the Communico Screen? You know, the guy who ran away from his son's house before they could send him to the Psych Center?"

Kevin didn't give the man a chance to answer the question. "That's true, sir, and I'm going home now. I'm sorry for the trouble I've caused but I had to do it. I--," he faltered. How could he explain about what he had done and why he had done it? Kevin brushed the gray lock of hair back from his forehead and reached absently for the glasses he had removed earlier while applying his make-up. "It's a very long story," he said finally and there was a weariness in his tone that was not merely the result of his exertion in the arena moments before.

He stood quietly before the two men. The shouting from the arena did not quite penetrate his consciousness.

Kevin thought of Sally and Edward and how they had reluctantly decided to send him to the Psych Rehabilitation Center because he persisted in "living in the past" as they put it and refused to be suitably interested in or impressed with the "progress" their century had made. When Kevin had tried to explain that the progress they spoke of was not all, he sincerely believed, of a worthwhile nature they had merely shrugged and looked at him oddly.

He was willing to go through with the Psychlab's "Rehabilitation Program" now for he had proved his point. There were some good things from the past and a clown was one of them.

A circus without noise and fanfare and excitement and laughter was nothing. He hated the sterility of its present scientific gadgetry. The best that could be said for it was that it did no obvious harm. But with the advent of _The Great Golden Ball_ people were taking one more step away from what could be a pleasant reality and one more step in the direction of Dreamland. And Kevin was certain that this Dreamland would one day prove to be crawling with nightmares.

"--something written about this a long time ago," Caldwell was saying to his assistant. "Looks like its got possibilities. Back in the 1900's they used to have these guys who made fools of themselves in the circus. People loved them. Sorta made them see their own faults and frustrations and all."

"But, sir--" the younger man began.

"I know we're supposed to be a streamlined outfit, but you can hear that crowd yelling out there as well as I can. That's proof enough for me! This thing's good!"

Kevin listened in amazement. This was not the way he had expected things to go. They should have sent him home in the custody of one of the robots by now. Or called the Psych Rehabilitation Center to have someone come and get him.

"What's your name, dad?" Caldwell asked.

"Molloy. Kevin Molloy," Kevin answered, feeling shy all at once. "But I didn't--"

"Listen Molloy. Get out there and do whatever you did before. No, don't ask any questions now. We can settle details later. But from now on you're working for Caldwell's Circus!"

Kevin pulled the skull piece on his head once again and with shaking fingers applied his grease paint. It was a poor job but Kevin hoped it would look good enough. Still fastening the red wig, he ran out into the arena and was stopped short by the thunderous roar that went up from the crowd. Kevin lifted a boy from the stands and sat down on the floor of the arena, the boy on his lap. The age old game began. Kevin's hands covered his face. The boy pulled away one finger after another until Kevin's painted smile beamed out at him. They laughed together.

Kevin played the clown and listened simultaneously to the voice shouting in his mind. Sally had always said an older man should have a hobby or something to keep him occupied. That was why I got such crazy ideas, she said, because I didn't have enough to do since I retired. Well, now I've got more than a hobby. I've got a job. I'm a clown! Maybe I can get Caldwell to put some sawdust on this floor; it's awfully slippery.

Kevin placed the boy back in the stands and skipped about the arena.

Maybe he'll put up a candy floss stand and sell popcorn instead of all those pills, Kevin thought as he smiled at the happy crowd.

Kevin slipped, fell, and the crowd howled its delight when he found the imaginary straw.

As he staggered exhausted from the arena, his heart singing, Mr. Caldwell was still excitedly talking to his assistant, who was vigorously nodding his head in agreement.

"---remember some ancient history myself! We'll get him to teach some other guys the same kind of stuff. Remind me to ask him about that. I figure maybe we've come full circle on this, and he's got just what we need around here---the human element."